

Digging into the Dark Ages

Early Medieval Public Archaeologies

edited by

Howard Williams and Pauline Clarke



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Top-left: Donaeld the Unready's Casket (posted to Twitter on 15 September 2018), based on the Franks Casket (Wulgar the Bard, 2018)

Top-right: 'Gallos' sculpture by Rubin Eynon on the cliffs at Tintagel (Photograph: Susan Greaney)

Bottom-left: View of the 2012 third season of excavations on the western side of the mound beneath the Pillar of Eliseg (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2012)

Bottom-right: Viðarr and Fenrir scanned from the Gosforth Cross, east side (C) (Scan by D. Powlesland with overlay by R.Lang from Parker and Collingwood 1917: 101)

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Contents

Contributors.....	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Foreword	vii
Chiara Bonacchi	

Public Archaeology for the Dark Ages.....	1
Howard Williams	
with Pauline Clarke, Victoria Bounds, Sarah Bratton, Amy Dunn, James Fish, Ioan Griffiths, Megan Hall, Joseph Keelan, Matthew Kelly, David Jackson, Stephanie Matthews, Max Moran, Niamh Moreton, Robert Neeson, Victoria Nicholls, Sacha O'Connor, Jessica Penaluna, Peter Rose, Abigail Salt, Amelia Studholme and Matthew Thomas	

Part 1: Dark Age Debates

Keep the Dark Ages Weird: Engaging the Many Publics of Early Medieval Archaeology	20
An Interview with Adrián Maldonado	
Colouring the Dark Ages: Perceptions of Early Medieval Colour in Popular Culture	31
Anne Sassin	
Why do Horned Helmets still Matter?	53
Sacha O'Connor	
Public Archaeology of Early Medieval Assembly Places and Practices: Þingvellir	59
Matthew Kelly	
Dressing for Ragnarök? Commodifying, Appropriating and Fetishising the Vikings	65
Madeline Walsh	

Part 2: The Public Dark Ages

The Vikings of JORVIK: 40 Years of Reconstruction and Re-enactment	76
Chris Tuckley	
Displaying the Dark Ages in Museums	101
Howard Williams, Pauline Clarke and Sarah Bratton	
Where History Meets Legend: Presenting the Early Medieval Archaeology of Tintagel Castle, Cornwall	114
Susan Greaney	
Digging up the Dark Ages in Cornwall: The Tintagel Challenge and St Piran's Oratory Experience.....	139
Jacqueline A Nowakowski and James Gossip	

Death and Memory in Fragments: Project Eliseg's Public Archaeology 172
Howard Williams and Suzanne Evans

Reading the Gosforth Cross: Enriching Learning through Film and Photogrammetry 193
Roger Lang and Dominic Powlesland

Crafting the Early Middle Ages: Creating Synergies between Re-enactors and Archaeologists 215
An interview with Adam Parsons and Stuart Strong

Part 3: Dark Age Media

Archaeology in *Alfred the Great* (1969) and *The Last Kingdom* (2015-) 246
Victoria Nicholls and Howard Williams

'It's the End of the World as we Know it ...': Reforging Ragnarök through Popular Culture 252
Mark A. Hall

The #GreatHeathenHunt: Repton's Public Early Medieval Archaeology 268
An interview with Cat Jarman

Vikings and Virality 286
Matthew Thomas

Old Norse in the Wild West: Digital Public Engagement on YouTube 300
An interview with Jackson Crawford

The Image Hoard: Using the Past as a Palette in Discussing the Politics of the Present 320
Wulfgar the Bard

Afterword: Whose 'Dark Ages'? 347
Bonnie Effros

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Acknowledgements

The 2020s are set to be a testing yet crucial juncture for the study of early medieval archaeology. Never before has the field which investigates the material cultures, monuments and landscapes of the ‘Dark Ages’ been more integral and pivotal in contemporary popular culture and political discourse. Likewise, the field’s intersections and dialogues with a range of other disciplines, from genomic research to literary studies, are more complex and conflicted than ever. Spanning from the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire in Late Antiquity to the closing of the Viking Age (the 5th to the 11th centuries AD), the Early Middle Ages has been long perceived as central to understanding the origins of the peoples, religions and nations of Europe today and their emerging global context. Moreover, the origins, history and current state of both archaeology as a whole, and the broader interdisciplinary study of early medieval societies, owe far more to the theories, methods and discoveries of early medieval archaeologists than is commonly admitted.

Yet, the critical investigation of early medieval archaeology’s public engagements and interactions has rarely received sustained and serious investigation. Therefore, having previously tackled the public archaeology of death (Williams *et al.* 2019a) and art/archaeology intersections in public engagement (Williams *et al.* 2019b), the public archaeology of the ‘Dark Ages’ seemed an essential topic for the 3rd University of Chester Archaeology Student Conference. This public event was organised by final-year Archaeology students and was open to all, free of charge. Aimed at tackling a key dimension of public archaeology in the contemporary world, the conference was hosted by Cheshire West and Cheshire’s Grosvenor Museum on 13 December 2017.

Titled ‘Digging into the Dark Ages’, the conference comprised of two guest speakers and 20 student contributions. It served as an academic and public engagement event for the Department of History and Archaeology and the University. It also operated as a formative exercise for students who subsequently produced summative written assignments based on their findings. The conference equally afforded students with transferable skills in public speaking and event organisation. Furthermore, the research conducted on topics of the students’ own choosing gave an opportunity for those willing and able to pursue their investigations further towards publication. Contributions from, and interviews with, heritage professionals and academics were commissioned, peer-reviewed, collated and edited during 2018 and 2019, creating a book which combines the work of experts and student voices, tackling early medieval public archaeologies from varied and fresh perspectives.

The editors wish to extend thanks to colleagues in the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Chester, especially, Dr Caroline Pudney, Dr Kara Critchell and Professor Meggen Gondek. The conference was only possible because of its hosts, and we extend heartfelt thanks to all the staff of Cheshire West and Cheshire’s Grosvenor Museum, notably the late Dr Peter Boughton. Thanks also to then-University of Chester postgraduate researcher Ben Wills-Eve for guiding the students in preparing for the event. We also thank the guest speakers, Dr Chiara Bonacchi and Dr Adrián Maldonado, who enhanced the conference by exploring key dimensions of the issues at play, drawing on their respective expertise. We are grateful to Chiara for agreeing to compose the Foreword and to Professor Bonnie Effros for crafting a broad-ranging Afterword. Finally, we appreciate the unflinching support of our publishers: Archaeopress.

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Williams, H., C. Pudney and A. Ezzeldin (eds) 2019b. *Public Archaeology: Arts of Engagement*. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Foreword

Chiara Bonacchi

From early engagements with history in the classroom to family visits of the JORVIK Viking Centre, from teenager discoveries of Tolkien's epic novels to TV viewings of *The Last Kingdom* in later adulthood, our everyday experiences have impressed upon our minds and hearts powerful but personalised images of what Nick Merriman called the 'official' past (Merriman 1991). These realms are constructions of knowing and feeling that may be more or less persistent. These images not only shape our understanding of the world as we see it, but stay attached to some of our deepest emotions; they are intermingled with our fears, hopes and dreams of safety, self-worth and acceptance. Endeavouring to understand the processes through which the past is presented is one of the most important facets of our profession as archaeologists and historians (Bonacchi 2014, 2018; Brophy 2018).

This volume reveals a range of 'images' of the early medieval past in contemporary society. It comprises an anthology of essays and interview-based chapters authored by researchers working in an array of different institutions as well contributions by former student who participated in the 2017 conference. Together, they provide a rich variety of perspectives into the contemporary framing of the 'Dark Ages'. 'Darkness' still remains, within British and European society, one of the properties that are most frequently associated with the mid-late first millennium AD. I remember reading through substantive reports of evaluations made by large London-based museums on the public perceptions of the medieval period for my doctoral research. They were filled with focus group participants' descriptions of this epoch as a 'foreign country' (Lowenthal 1985) that is poorly lit, and mostly dull, cold, dump and technologically retrograde. Several years have passed since then and, building on previous studies, my latest investigations into the present-day use of the Iron Age, Roman and post-Roman periods¹ have showed how these ideas can be tied to exclusive narratives of 'self' and 'otherness' that bear dire social and political implications.

This book is, however, particularly effective in complicating the picture I have just portrayed and in bringing to light counter-narratives that reflect on the 'dark' sides of the Dark Ages in ways that go beyond the shadow cast in the early modern period and crystallised via the transformational writings of Edward Gibbon (1776). The idea of the 'Fall' of the Roman Empire and its intermittent and variously contested fortune in historiography (e.g. Brown 1971; Ward-Perkins 2005;) is alive in – amongst others – TV series, videos shared on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook conversations about the 'destiny' of polities such as the United States or supra-national ones like the European Union (Bonacchi *et al.* 2018). Yet, being 'dark' can also carry elements of fascination, and those elements, whether accurate or inaccurate, may serve as compelling forces leading visitors to sites like Tintagel, or to participate in Viking re-enactment, to name just two of the examples provided in the chapters that follow.

Navigating issues relating to authority, interpretation, accuracy, appeal and value, this collection is the first focused attempt to shed light on the public lives of the 'Dark Ages' as both 'retrotopias' (Bauman 2017) and 'retrophobias', and as personally appropriated histories that are performed across online and offline fields of human activity and heritage crafting.

¹ This has been undertaken in the context of the AHRC-funded project Ancient Identities in Modern Britain, which is a collaboration between Durham University and the University of Stirling (grant n. AH/N006151/1; <https://www.dur.ac.uk/research/directory/view/?mode=project&id=944>).

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Public Archaeology for the Dark Ages

Howard Williams

with Pauline Clarke, Victoria Bounds, Sarah Bratton, Amy Dunn, James Fish, Ioan Griffiths, Megan Hall, Joseph Keelan, Matthew Kelly, David Jackson, Stephanie Matthews, Max Moran, Niamh Moreton, Robert Neeson, Victoria Nicholls, Sacha O'Connor, Jessica Penaluna, Peter Rose, Abigail Salt, Amelia Studholme and Matthew Thomas

This introductory chapter identifies the principal issues and themes in the public archaeology of the Early Middle Ages, exploring the specific and compelling challenges of investigating and evaluating the early medieval past in contemporary society mediated by archaeology. In doing so, we review and contextualise the contributions to the 3rd University of Chester Archaeology Student conference: 'Digging into the Dark Ages', which took place at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, 13 December 2017. The resulting book comprises a selection of the student contributions and a range of additional chapters by heritage professionals and academics. The book's structure and contents are then outlined: the first-ever collection dedicated to 'Dark Age' public archaeology. It is argued that for future research, critical public archaeologies are essential for ethical and engaging early medieval archaeology in both theory and practice.

Introduction¹

Professor Broom (played by actor Ian McShane) narrates the opening sequence of 2019 film *Hellboy* (starring David Harbour and Milla Jovovich). King Arthur and Merlin ride to Pendle Hill to confront Nimue, the Queen of Blood, and her creatures of darkness. Broom sets the scene: 'The year is 517 AD, known as the Dark Ages, and for f**king good reason' (Hellboy 2019).

Two years before, in 2017, the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu returned after 23 years of retirement from the music industry with a three-day socially critical art event in Liverpool called 'Welcome to the Dark Ages'. With multiple striking funerary archaeological undertones, they launched the 'Toxteth Day of the Dead' and announced their plan to build a 'People's Pyramid' comprised of bricks containing human cremated remains.²

A year earlier still, to distinguish the traces of 5th–7th-century buildings revealed by excavation and on display to visitors from the nearby ruins of the 13th-century castle on, English Heritage's indoor displays and on-site interpretation boards were updated at Tintagel (Cornwall), calling its early medieval phase a 'Dark Age' (Williams 2016a). The term's widespread deployment on site was part of the redesign of this premier heritage destination involving new art and installations. The Arthurian allusions 'Tintagel: where history meets legend') and 'Dark Age' label together prompted a storm of protest in 2016. Some academics supported a social media campaign to convince English Heritage to '#stopthedarkages'. Meanwhile some locals and Cornish nationalists were furious at the 'disneyfication' of the site as well as the derogatory 'Dark Age' epithet (Williams 2016b; Greaney this volume).

From Hollywood films to the KLF to English Heritage: the 'Dark Ages' remain an eclectic, mutable, contentious but unquestionably widespread frame of reference in contemporary society. There seem

¹ The chapter was authored by Howard Williams with input from Pauline Clarke. The entire student group are credited for their ideas and arguments which were presented at the student conference, adapted for their assignments, and a selection are published in this collection. Their choices and endeavours have shaped this Introduction and the book project.

² <https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/weird-events-klf-welcome-dark-ages-2132941>

to be many different intersecting ‘Dark Ages’, bearing complex, contradictory and controversial social, religious, economic and political associations. They also harbour varying degrees of negative and positive, real-world and fantastical bearings, and embody both educational and performative political dimensions (see also Elliot 2017: 55–77). Only some of these ‘Dark Ages’ relate directly to how contemporary society engages with and judges the material evidence of the centuries following the decline and collapse of the Western Roman Empire. Others relate to the popular perception of later medieval societies and materialities. Further ‘Dark Ages’ are fixated more with our anxieties and imaginings about the future of our ‘civilization’, its communities, built environments and late-modern consumerism.

In this context, how do the material cultures of the early medieval period (defined here as the 5th–11th centuries AD, and including graves, settlements, artefacts, art, inscriptions, architectures and landscapes), manifest themselves and acquire meanings and significance in our contemporary world? Within the complex entanglement of archaeology with contemporary culture and politics, what specific issues are faced for the public engagement and politics of ‘Dark Age’ societies mediated by their material traces? How do we promote some narratives and discourage and counter misleading and dangerous stories? What are archaeologists’ ethical considerations and responsibilities to improve the ways in which we engage and educate global publics, involve new audiences, attract new participants and practitioners, and tackle misconceptions of, the middle and later first millennium AD?

A starting point is to recognise that ‘public archaeology’, as identified and explored cogently by Gabriel Moshenska (2017), incorporates not only the practice and critical evaluation of public outreach (archaeologists working with the public) and community archaeology (archaeology by the public), but also the practice and investigation of public-sector archaeology, including heritage conservation, management and interpretation of artefacts, monuments, sites, architectures and landscapes. The field of public archaeology also extends to archaeology deployed in educational environments, and to strategies and approaches in digital and open archaeology that seek to bring archaeological knowledge to wider and diverse audiences. Furthermore, public archaeology incorporates the practice and appraisal of the communication and dissemination of archaeological knowledge via the media and throughout popular culture, including intersections between real and imagined past times and a range of present-day landscapes, monuments and material cultures, including archaeologists’ investigations of the early medieval past as a ‘brand’ within our contemporary ‘experience’ society (Morrison 2000; Holtorf 2007).

Public archaeology also endeavours to evaluate and critique the politics of archaeology, including how archaeologists might operate as public intellectuals and political voices in contemporary society (Tarlow and Nilsson Stutz 2013; Nilsson Stutz 2018). Thus, in tackling ‘public archaeology’ for the ‘Dark Ages’ in this broad and multi-faceted way, we situate public archaeology, following both Grima (2016: 54) and Moshenska (2017), as a disciplinary practice and theoretical orientation that investigates both archaeologists’ voices and practices in the contemporary world. Indeed, arguably of all periods of the human past, the Early Middle Ages faces some of the most enduring challenges: the cocktail of immense popularity but also widespread ethnic, religious and racial stereotypes, and thus enduring popular appeal and political uses and appropriations.

Yet this is not all, following Almansa (2018), we must consider public archaeology as itself a critical theory of archaeology, one which opens new trajectories for research and public engagement. For a robust public archaeology of the Early Middle Ages, we must tackle head-on the popular culture of archaeological narratives, critiquing not only the presence of words, symbols and ideas of medieval origin, but also evaluations of the complex uses and reuses of early medieval artefacts, buildings, monuments and landscapes, and considering their reproduction and replication, life-histories and popular cultural resonances down to, and in, contemporary communities and environments as well as printed and digital

spaces (Jones 2004; Foster and Jones 2019). Central to this is a greater investigation of who is doing what, and for whom, in the study of the early medieval past: revaluating its creators, participants and audiences.

Having set the scene, let us now consider some specific dimensions to public early medieval archaeologies. While we recognise the broader European and global contexts, our attention here focuses on the UK.

The politics and popular culture of the ‘Dark Ages’

How are archaeologists investigating the ‘Dark Ages’ in contemporary society? In the UK, and indeed in much of northern and western Europe, ‘public archaeology’ debates and practices strongly feature the early medieval period, from television documentaries to museum displays. The 5th–11th centuries AD is frequently perceived as the ‘Dark Ages’ in popular discussions: characterised in terms of ‘barbarian’ invasions, Christian conversion, and kingdom formation. Present-day concepts of identity, faith and origin myths are seemingly indelibly linked and revitalised through nationalist, colonialist and imperialist discourses which appropriate and mobilise the early medieval period in complex interleaving fashions (e.g. Effros 2003: 1–70; Geary 2001; Sommer 2017).

Yet increasingly, and particularly over the last half-century, archaeological discoveries, analyses and syntheses are contributing towards fundamental revaluations of traditional historical narratives and their racial and religious underpinnings, as well as the many legendary and mythological elements that have sometimes been treated as historical and archaeological events and processes (e.g. Carver 2019; Halsall 2013; Higham and Ryan 2013; Hills 2003; Harland 2019; Oosthuizen 2019). Archaeologists can offer new discoveries, but also distinctive stories and fresh paradigms, operating on a range of scales, media and contexts, in which the social, political, economic and religious histories of early medieval Europe can be told. Having said this, how can archaeologists do this while popular culture retains static and out-moded narratives for the era (see Content and Williams 2010). Moreover, are we hampered by still-popular accounts of the period, including James Campbell’s (1982) *The Anglo-Saxons* and Michael Wood’s (1981) *In Search of the Dark Ages*, which whilst engaging are now decades old and no longer represent the latest archaeological research and thinking?

While there have been numerous prominent community archaeology and public engagement projects with an early medieval focus, including notably the Sedgeford project (Faulkner 2000) and the ongoing Dig Ventures/Durham University dig at Lindisfarne,³ the explicit and extended investigation of the ‘public archaeology’ for early medieval Europe, including the many sub-dimensions Moshenska (2017) identifies, has to date escaped detailed academic attention. While academics themselves explore the period in relation to nuanced perspectives and are critical of out-moded racial and culture-historic narratives, fantastical and simplistic narratives persist in popular culture without detailed exploration or rebuke. For Anglo-Saxon archaeology, to take one region by way of example, to date there have been very few studies attempting to evaluate some of the principal educational and popular interactions with archaeological evidence, sites and narratives (see Lucy and Herring 1999; Marzinzik 2011; Walsh and Williams 2019; Williams 2009) and fewer still that situate these in relation to prevalent pseudo-historical narratives for early medieval Britain more broadly, from ‘Arthur’ to ‘Alfred’ (see Halsall 2013). There are, to date, only a small number of studies which have tackled further material ‘early medievalisms’, including music and intangible heritages of the early medieval past (Ashby and Schofield 2015); the biographies and replications of early medieval stone sculpture (e.g. Jones 2004; Foster and Jones 2019); re-enactment societies and festivals (Kobialka 2013); the early medieval period as represented in films and television programmes (e.g. Hall 2004, 2009; Sanmark and Williams 2019); heritage experiences of ‘time travel’ to the late prehistoric/early historic past (e.g. Holtorf 2013); and finally, the broader popular culture consumption of the early medieval past (see now Dale 2019).

³ <https://digventures.com/lindisfarne/>

In this context, there is a pressing need to extend and develop critical historiographies of early medieval archaeology, such as the research conducted on the nineteenth-century origins of Anglo-Saxon archaeology and how its definitions and interpretations, inspired by theories of race, religion and class, have continued to shape both specialist and popular attitudes towards the *Adventus Saxonum* and the origins of England (Lucy 1998; McCombe 2011; Williams 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, 2013; see also Effros 2003; 2012). Furthermore, public archaeological research must build upon evaluations of how we envision and display early medieval archaeological contexts for both academic and popular audiences (Gardela 2016; Watson and Williams 2019; Williams 2009; Williams 2016c). Additional key dimensions of public archaeology relating to the Early Middle Ages includes digital public archaeology, such as blogging (e.g. Meyers and Williams 2014; Williams and Atkin 2015; Williams 2019a) and video-blogging (Tong *et al.* 2015) as both media for public engagement and academic critique.

To do this we can take inspiration from the growing number of literary and interdisciplinary studies of medievalism (e.g. Albin *et al.* 2019; Alexander 2007; Elliott 2017; Harty 2011; Sturtevant 2017; Wollenberg 2018). However, to date, such studies of ‘medievalism’ remain literary and historical in focus. To extend their evaluations to archaeological and heritage dimensions and stakeholder communities, as well as to digital environments, archaeology must be front and centre as theory, method, practice and data.

Why is this project particularly timely?

There are a series of more specific contexts that justify why this book is not only timely but essential. The last decade has seen an upsurge in early medieval academic research operating in a complex and evolving digital media (Williams *et al.* 2019b). Particularly in the last few years, academic discoveries and publications have benefitted from open-access digital publication, with the peer-reviewed articles disseminated via stories composed on online news media platforms, facilitating ‘viral’ coverage. A notable and ‘viral’ early medieval global news story was the osteological and genomic reinterpretation of the Birka Bj581 chamber grave dating to the 10th century AD as a female-sexed individual and thus perhaps a ‘warrior-woman’: the real-world equivalent to Lagertha from the popular TV series *Vikings* (Hedenstierna Jonson *et al.* 2017; Price *et al.* 2019). Another example is the re-dating of the mass-graves and furnished inhumation burials from Repton, Derbyshire to confirm an association with the Great Heathen Army’s over-wintering in 873–874 (Jarman *et al.* 2018). During 2019, the publication and media stories of the ‘Prittlewell Prince’ offers a further prominent instance of a carefully strategised launch of a new museum exhibition, academic and popular publications, and press releases to the media (Hirst and Scull 2019). These examples provoke us to reconsider how digital media are affecting how we disseminate and debate early medieval scholarship, with many scholars engaging with social media, via blogs and for digital platforms like *The Conversation* alongside journals and books. Through dialogues with journalists, as well as more direct means of engagement such as academic open-access digital publication and a range of new media, including podcasts and video blogging, early medieval enthusiasts subsequently engage with new audiences and debate evolve rapidly online regarding archaeological discoveries and analyses (see also Williams 2018; 2019b). Yet this also prompts many new challenges, and genomic research and popular consumption is fostering a host of new challenges, including the popular uncritical dissemination of race science through both ancient and modern DNA research (see Booth 2018; see Maldonado this volume).

The Early Middle Ages is more than just in the news and online: it can be a prominent part of immersive mass-entertainment too. In recent years it has exponentially enhanced its profile in Western popular culture through television documentaries, but particularly via a revitalised craze of the Victorian fantasy and popular historic renditions. The ‘Dark Ages’ are thus commercialised and manifest through the arts and entertainment industries (see also Ashby and Schofield 2015; Trafford and Pluskowski 2007; Dale 2019). Fictional versions inspired by the early medieval past have a long history, but they are now proliferating like never before and via a host of media: via printed fiction, video games, television dramas and films. Over

the last two decades, versions of imaginary 'Dark Ages' can be experienced via *Skyrim* to *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*, inspirations from Norse mythology including *American Gods* and the Marvel *Thor* comics and movies, and fantasy genres heavily inspired by medieval mythology, history and archaeology, including *Game of Thrones*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (Larrington 2016; Ford Burley 2019; Hall 2004; 2009; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007; Williams 2019a). It is increasingly apparent that the 'Dark Ages' is alive and well in our popular culture via many guises, sometimes directly inspired by archaeological interpretations and narratives, often wholly disconnected from academic discourse. Moreover, this panoply of renditions require detailed investigations by those trained as archaeologists and familiar with early medieval material culture. Indeed, lead researchers are increasingly aware that we cannot ignore these detailed and rich entanglements with archaeological evidence and interpretations, but explore them and their implications for our own storytelling (e.g. Dale 2019; Price 2015).



Figure 1: the student-designed logo for the 'Digging into the Dark Ages' conference

The Dark Ages is darker still than popular science news and entertainment, however. Indeed, the aesthetics and stories of the Early Middle Ages have long fostered extremist fantasies about the past but these have expanded and intensified in recent years (e.g. Ford Burley 2019). Notably, the global popularist and far-right's appropriations of Germanic and Norse material culture, myths and symbols has garnered scholarly attention, including how we evaluate it, and how we position ourselves and our



Figure 2: Final-year archaeology students participating in the student conference in December 2017 at the Grosvenor Museum

scholarship in response to it (Bonacchi *et al.* 2018; Niklasson and Hølleland 2018; Richardson and Booth 2017). In particular, following the 'Unite the Right' rally of 13 May 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia, and subsequently with citations to the early medieval past in the message left behind by the shooter who massacred worshippers in a mosque in Christchurch (New Zealand) in March 2019, medievalists have witnessed further instances of the longer-term close proximity of toxic extremism with fantasies of racial purity and national origins within white supremacist and Islamophobic discourses (see also Elliott 2017; Wollenberg 2018). In addition to these global concerns, for the UK, the early medieval past is contested on multiple scales simultaneously

between different religious, ethnic and socio-political groups, as witnessed, for example, in the mobilisation of the end of Rome and the ‘Dark Ages’ in defining positions and arguments in both the 2014 IndyRef and 2016 Brexit referenda debates (Bonacchi *et al.* 2018; Brophy 2018; Gardner 2017; Gardner and Harrison 2017).

Building on this intense and divisive political environment, there had been multiple controversies regarding the uses and abuses of the Early Middle Ages in academia, the heritage sector and museums. A good example of this is the aforementioned #stopthedarkages reaction to the use of the term ‘Dark Ages’ on heritage boards at Tintagel, Cornwall and in English Heritage’s broader educational and public-facing literature (Hicks 2017; see also Williams 2016a and b). Likewise, the debate surrounding the re-display of the Viking gallery in the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen has led to public disagreements between scholars and the public over the involvement of non-specialists in the creation of the display, notably its more anachronistic and speculative representations of Viking people (Pentz *et al.* 2019; Sindbæk 2019). Other pertinent strands of debate have emerged since the conference, prompted by a growing awareness of the early medieval past’s use by the far-right. Notably, the merits of using the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ for scholars and scholarship when investigating the Early Middle Ages has been challenged afresh (Pitts 2020). These debates demand robust correctives and critique from archaeologists, for whom ethnic terms have long been widely deployed for both specialist and public-facing media to communicate the material cultures of the Early Middle Ages.

Given this background, when tasking the final-year single honours Archaeology students at the University of Chester in the 2017–2018 academic year to tackle a theme in public archaeology as part of the module ‘HI6001 Archaeology and Contemporary Society’, a focus on the Early Middle Ages seemed potentially rich and rewarding as well as timely. The previous two student conferences had already incorporated distinctive critiques of early medieval monuments and material culture in heritage and museum environments as well as the Early Middle Ages in digital media (Evans and Williams 2019; Gardela 2019; Walsh and Williams 2019; Watson and Williams 2019; Williams and Alexander 2019; Williams and Evans 2019; Williams 2019a; 2019b; Williams *et al.* 2019). Consequently, the third University of Chester Archaeology Student Conference, which took place on 13 December 2017, was thus called ‘Digging into the Dark Ages’. This title consciously encapsulated the stereotype of ‘Dark Ages’ as a popular, but non-ethnically specific term for the period: one readily understood yet fraught with problems. Meanwhile, the title also deployed a double entendre for ‘digging’, evoking both the practical discoveries and insights into the period afforded by archaeology, and the intellectual ‘digging’ of the past through critical evaluation of archaeology’s narratives and public engagements.

Having identified why this book is timely, let us now sketch the conference proceedings.



Figure 3: Dr Chiara Bonacchi (left), Prof. Howard Williams (centre) and Dr Adrián Maldonado (right) at the conference, December 2017

The ‘Digging into the Dark Ages’ conference

The 3rd University of Chester Archaeology Student Conference was a public and free day conference, organised by final-year archaeology students and hosted by the Grosvenor Museum, Chester. It was a formative exercise leading to a summative assignment for the students involved, but it equally served as a public forum for debating a distinctive theme in public archaeological research. Simultaneously, through the event, and its digital presence in the form of a Wordpress blog site, it served as an example of public outreach in itself.⁴ Note: while the first and second student conferences had been recorded for video, the sensitive nature of some of the topics presented by students was such that we felt it best not to share via social media to uphold our duty of care within the context of a University educational activity (cf. Morgan 2018) (Figures 1 and 2).

The conference followed the format of previous conferences (see Williams *et al.* 2019c). In total, 20 students presented their work across six themed sessions addressing: (i) debates; (ii) entertainment; (iii) heritage displays; (iv) digital themes; (v) commercial and consumerism dimensions; and (vi) heritage management and political contestations of the Early Middle Ages. The conference thus explored both analogue and digital mechanisms for public engagement and participation in archaeological research into the Early Middle Ages, as well as popular, economic and political appropriations of the Early Middle Ages through its archaeology. The student talks were augmented by question-and-answer sessions.

The Guest Lectures

The conference was enriched considerably through the contributions of two keynote speakers. Chiara Bonacchi (University of Stirling) presented a case study in digital archaeology, evaluating how the end of the Western Roman Empire was mobilised in debates surrounding the Brexit referendum (subsequently published: Bonacchi *et al.* 2018). Meanwhile, Adrián Maldonado (National Museum of Scotland) explored the misuse of palaeogenetics and modern DNA in narratives surrounding the early medieval past (addressed in Maldonado, this volume; see also Booth 2018). Both guest lectures afforded the students and other delegates superb present-day case studies in the investigation of the uses and abuses of archaeological evidence and narratives in personal and political contexts (Figure 3).

Dark Age Debates

The first session comprised three presentations which tackled broad contemporary issues in the public perception and engagement with the early medieval past. Ioan Griffiths reviewed the use of the term ‘Dark Ages’ and found its use rife outside of academic literature, including in newspaper articles and media debates as a derogatory term applied to people, institutions and situations typified by ignorant, prejudiced, superstitious and old-fashioned attitudes and ideas (see also Elliott 2017). He identified its mixed response among historians and archaeologists when applied to the Early Middle Ages itself (e.g. see Halsall 2013; Hicks 2017) and found it rarely used by heritage organisations, with many clearly avoiding the term, with the exception of Tintagel where the term ‘Dark Ages’ was common (see also Williams 2017; Greaney this volume). Griffiths had further distinctive points to make, speculating that the term specifically maximised associations with ‘mystery’ and the Arthurian allusions of this prominent heritage attraction. Griffiths’s second point was that it is not merely in political discourses in which ‘Dark Age’ is deployed in a derogatory fashion (Elliott 2017): it is actually widely deployed rhetorically in medical and biological literature as a term implying backward and ignorant methods and remedies. In short, scientists and academics are evidently as guilty as politicians and the media in perpetuating the widespread use of ‘Dark Ages’ to allude to a myth of progress.

⁴ <https://diggingintothedarkages.wordpress.com/>



Figure 4: Skyrim archaeology explored by Stephanie Matthews

Next, Sacha O'Connor tackled the topic of the iconic significance of horned helmets in contemporary society in 'Why do horned helmets still matter?' (see O'Connor this volume). This was followed by Matthew Kelly who considered the Icelandic althing site of Thingvellir in relation to heritage interpretation and extremist appropriations (see Kelly this volume).

Together these three presentations served to identify the complex ways in which archaeological ideas interact with fiction, fantasy and politics in popular culture. Yet while the iconic horned helmet might be regarded as floating free

of real-world moorings in heritage sites, monuments and landscapes (see also Ward 2000), the term 'Dark Ages' persists in relation to particular heritage sites (see Greaney this volume), while nationalist myths of origin are very much alive and well in the presentation of Þingvellir.

Dark Age Entertainment

The second conference session explored the reception of the Dark Ages in the arts, focusing on video games, film and television (see also Hall 2004, 2009, this volume; Harmes 2017; Harty 2011; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007; Williams 2019a).

In 'Dark Age video games: authenticity and arms in *Skyrim*', Stephanie Matthews evaluated the action role-playing video game *The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim* (Figure 4). This virtual gaming world is populated by fantastical ruins, architectures and material cultures: an epic adventuring environment inspired by Old Norse legends and myths through the lens of 20th/early 21st-century fantasy literature, Matthews focused on the authenticity of the martial gear as a playful engagement with an imagined 'early medieval' universe (for context, see Copplestone 2017; Reinhard 2018). The weapons, body armour, shields and helmets were shown to be starkly fantastical, with little relationship to known early medieval equivalents. Matthews insightfully recognised a relatively close similarity between the *Skyrim* war hammer and the axe-hammer from the early seventh-century ship-burial beneath Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, whether by coincidence or not. Following Meyers Emery and Reinhard (2015), she argued that the game creates an aura of pastness (see also Copplestone 2017), but also that many of the detailed misconceptions might provide the basis for constructive public discussions and debates about the 'real' early medieval past. Moreover, there is both the technology to enable, and the appetite among gamers, for more authentic early medieval pasts to be portrayed in future immersive experiences in virtual worlds provided by this popular medium.

Next, in the presentation 'Archaeology in *Alfred the Great* (1969) and *The Last Kingdom* (2015-)', Victoria Nicholls compared the representations of the late 9th-century West Saxon landscape, including its worked landscapes, buildings and costumes in the film starring David Hemmings and the first season of the recent television adaption of Bernard Cornwell's *The Saxon Stories* starring Alexander Dreymon.

She was able to show anachronisms and issues of authenticity abound in each production, focusing on dress accessories, weapons, ships, halls, fortresses and battlefields. She concluded that the decades that divide them do not readily see an improved attention to detail or plausibility in recreating a 'Dark Age' world. This talk has been developed further in the context of this book (Nicholls and Williams this volume).

James Fish then tackled the significance of the great hall in the television drama *Vikings*: 'The great hall in *Vikings*: fact and fiction'. He presented the evidence for early medieval halls before considering the centrality of the hall, its external features, internal fittings, and its varied functions for feasting, ceremony, and many other activities. Fish also explored the personalisation of halls for different characters, seeing that while many details are speculative, attention has been afforded to creating a sense of poorly lit but lavishly adorned dwellings that were at the heart of social, political, legal, cultic and economic life in mid-late first millennium AD Scandinavia and in the legends and myths that stemmed from this world.

The fourth and final contribution to the *Dark Age Entertainment* session, by Peter Rose, considered the representations of the Early Middle Ages in the time-travel science fiction series *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007). As well as portraying a fictional archaeologist as a scientific detective and adventurer (see Holtorf 2007 for context), in the Season 1 episode 'Thor's Hammer' the Norse god Thor is revealed to be an alien being. The plot incorporates an encounter with a stone monumental version of a Viking-period Thor's hammer pendant set atop of free-standing early medieval cross-shaft. In crude terms, therefore, despite the fantastical plot, the show reveals a degree of attention to 'Viking' artefacts and carved stone monuments. Moreover, tellingly, Thor himself wears headgear clearly inspired by the Gjermundbu helmet, and thus without the stereotypical horns.

In combination, the four presentations in this session afforded a sense of the wide range of fashions by which early medieval archaeology permeates Western popular culture. While the 'Vikings' are preeminent, fantasy worlds draw their inspirations far wider, and through multiple generations of epic adaptations via Tolkien and other writers, before they are rendered in video games. Archaeological engagement with these genres need not focus on criticism and denouncement, but upon using both stereotypes and misunderstandings as platforms with which to tackle new approaches and interpretations of the archaeological record (see also Williams 2019a).

Displaying the Dark Ages

The third conference session comprised a triad of papers exploring how the early medieval past is curated and displayed in museum contexts, a topic that has received sparse published discussion to date (Lucy and Herring 1999; Walsh and Williams 2019; Williams 2009). The expectation for displays to go beyond, and challenge, our stereotypes, is a pressing need for current and future heritage sites and museums (e.g. Ashby 2014).

Sarah Bratton's talk – 'So 'dark' you can hardly see it: the Early Middle Ages in the museums of Chester and Liverpool' – identified the relatively limited attention afforded to the early medieval past in museums in the North West of England. Her contribution has been adapted and developed for inclusion in this book (Williams *et al.* this volume).

In 'Jorvik's re-opening explored', Robert Neeson considered the 2017 re-launch of JORVIK Viking Centre having been closed to undergo a significant overhaul following the damage caused by the 2015 flooding of York city. The contribution to this volume by Tuckley takes up and contextualises the re-launch, but Neeson in particular emphasised the Centre's use of the axe as an icon of York's Viking past. This was

not only because of the axe as a Norse weapon and tool, but specifically through the association with the name of the tenth-century king of Northumbria: the Norwegian Eric Bloodaxe.

Amelia Studholme then evaluated the distinctive open-air museum of West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, in her talk 'Re-enacting the Early Middle Ages'. She reflected on her experiences of visiting the museum and witnessing a re-enactment display (see also Holtorf 2013). The talk also considered West Stow's biannual RingQuest: drawing on the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* to have an orc in residence! Studholme drew on Johnson's (2015) discussion of the theatrics and somatic power of historical re-enactment to engage children with the early medieval past and experimental archaeology.

The Digital Dark Ages

The fourth session explored digital archaeology, for which there is a burgeoning literature but there remains scant published literature addressing and evaluating the specific interdisciplinary and archaeology themes and challenges associated with engaging publics in the Early Middle Ages (but see Richardson and Booth 2017).

Amy Dunn considered 'The digital public archaeology of early medieval stone monuments', making a case that many churches do not appreciate, conserve or interpret the unique carved stone monuments in their custody for visitors, in part due to limited funds and the lack of expertise guidance. Meanwhile, information and images available online are of variable detail and quality. Using churches in Cheshire, Lancashire and the Isle of Man as case studies, she identified the effective uses of Wikipedia and websites for some churches. Dunn highlighted the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture and lauded their extensive online digital corpus, and suggested online information and resources could be created to further public engagement. The chapter by Lang and Powlesland in this volume takes up this challenge.

Next, Matthew Thomas's 'Vikings and virality' explored how we must more effectively target our digital engagement to target questions asked via the search engine Google (see Thomas this volume). Focusing on the story of Viking warrior women promulgated virally via online news outlets and social media provides a valuable case study to reflect on the rich potentials and challenges of appealing to popular public interests in the early medieval past (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017; Price *et al.* 2019).

Finally, Joseph Keelan tackled the digital media explosion that surrounded the 2017 *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* open-access publication on Birka Bj581 (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017). 'Viking warrior women? The Birka chamber grave and its impact on the media' considered the huge scale and conflicting views expressed in the media regarding the identity of the individual in grave Bj581 and why it was such a controversial and appealing story.

Selling the Dark Ages

This significant theme was tackled by four talks in the fifth session, each identifying and critiquing ways in which early medieval material cultures are commodified by the heritage industry and other businesses. In 'Dark Age artefacts in museum advertising' Victoria Bounds discussed how two early medieval artefacts were widely used in the promotional materials of Ludlow Museum (Shropshire). She argued that this constituted a misrepresentation of the scale and character of the early medieval collections on display where there are no wider narratives regarding the 5th–11th centuries AD. This has broader implications for how other early medieval artefacts are turned into icons for museums, and thus potentially treated as de-contextualised 'treasures', from the Staffordshire Hoard and the Sutton Hoo helmet to the Book of Kells and the Alfred Jewel.

Jessica Penaluna explored neo-Pagan commodification of runic texts and their purported magical qualities, through a review of shops, festivals and online outlets. She identified how the scholarship linking runic inscriptions to archaeological contexts and past societies is deemed largely irrelevant, and how 'Celtic' healing magic is seemingly conflated with Germanic and Norse runes in some contemporary Paganisms. Her talk foregrounded the challenge of negotiating between neo-Pagan narratives and its commercial dimensions, and academic scholarship regarding runes and their occurrence on early medieval monuments and material culture.

Next, Abigail Salt evaluated 'Selling the Vikings via online museum shops', exploring the commodification of the early medieval period by comparing national Scandinavian museums and the British Museum. She was able to identify how museum shops deploy a complex range of items, from 'serious' reproduction items (including pendants and glassware) to more playful items including 'Viking' rubber ducks for bath time (see also Ward 2000).

Finally, in '1066: nationhood, memorials and car insurance', David Jackson considered how the Battle of Hastings is commemorated and commodified in contemporary British society, from Battle Abbey and public sculpture to its use as a marketing tool (see also Hicks 2006: 282–302).

Imagining the Dark Ages

The final session explored some of the more controversial fantasies about the 'Dark Ages', some merely misguided, some dangerous and violent. Niamh Moreton considered the persistent heritage connections between prehistoric and early historic archaeological sites, including Glastonbury, South Cadbury and Tintagel, with Arthurian legends in 'The potentials and pitfalls of an Arthurian Early Middle Ages' (see also Halsall 2013). She recognised the many problems with the Arthurian connection but also the benefits in sparking interest in a broader public who might not normally engage with the early medieval past.

This theme was taken up by Max Moran in 'Exploring the public archaeology of Tintagel: Arthur and archaeology' in relation to the recent re-branding of Tintagel by English Heritage. Moran reviewed the archaeological evidence for the site and its long biography from prehistory to the present, and discussed the effective dimensions of the new narratives, emphasising the inseparable connections of history and legend at the site, despite the widespread public backlash. Like Salt's paper, however, Moran notes the problematic Arthurian gifts that English Heritage are still willing to sell through their online shop as part of an ongoing problem of Arthurian commodification and misrepresentation linking the English Heritage property to Tintagel's many businesses more broadly (see also Greaney this volume).

Finally, Megan Hall considered 'Analysing the appropriation of early medieval runes by contemporary far-right groups', suggesting that there might not be an easy and straightforward method of combatting such misuses by extremist groups. In particular, she considered the potential threats of violence and abuse targeting those who challenge the misuse of the past by the far-right, particularly among younger and female scholars. She did point out positive steps, such as the Facebook group 'Vikingar Mot Racism' to combat the appropriation of the early medieval past by the far-right among re-enactors and enthusiasts.⁵ One can also add the need for academics to not simply signal their distance from white supremacism, but to adapt their curricula and public engagements to counter extremist narratives (e.g. Downham 2017; Sayer 2017).

Welcome to the Dark Ages: From Conference to Book

As with the previous two conferences, students were given the opportunity to participate as authors and/or editors in publishing their research. In total 6 students of the 20 took up this opportunity,

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vikingarmotrasism/>

although one unfortunately subsequently withdrew. Pauline Clarke was in the same year-group, but as a combined honours student she did not take the module HI6001; she attended but had not presented at the conference. She volunteered to co-edit the book.

These student pieces were joined by especially commissioned additional studies with contributions spanning a wide range of themes, plus one former student. This has resulted to the first-ever edited collection dedicated to the public archaeology of the Early Middle Ages or 'Dark Ages'.

The structure of the book has inevitably shifted, and the six conference sessions described above have been re-arranged into three sections. In 'Dark Age Debates', Maldonado, Sassini, O'Connor, Kelly and Walsh explore a range of fringe, popular, educational, political and commercial appropriations of the Early Middle Ages. The second section, 'The Public Dark Ages', includes prominent case studies in the heritage interpretation, community engagement and the creation of new strategies for real-world and digital engagement in the early medieval past by Tuckley, Williams *et al.*, Greaney, Nowakowski and Gossip, Williams and Evans, Lang and Powlesland, and Parsons and Strong. The third and concluding section, called 'Dark Age Media' contains evaluations by Nicholls and Williams, Hall, Jarman, Thomas, Crawford and Wulgar the Bard, tackling the Early Middle Ages in film, television and the use of digital media, from simple Google searches and open-access resources and publications to Twitter and YouTube, as outreach strategies and platforms of dialogue with non-specialist publics.

Inevitably there remain gaps and unexpected emphases, relating to which students wished to take their work forward to publication, and those heritage professionals and archaeologists who agreed to contribute. However, these have been reduced to a minimum by inviting digital public archaeologist Dr Chiara Bonacchi to compose a Foreword. Equally important in providing a wider perspective, Professor Bonnie Effros has composed a far-reaching Afterword tackling the development of medievalisms' investigation from multiple perspectives. A further distinctive way by which further voices and perspectives were included was by interviewing key practitioners and researchers. Hence, the aforementioned chapters by Maldonado, Parsons and Strong, Crawford and Jarman were commissioned from those innovating in different dimensions of public engagement in the early medieval past.

Discussion

We hope this book will foster further critical investigations in the public archaeology of the Early Middle Ages which evaluate our practices and engagements in a rigorous and systematic fashion (cf. Almansa 2018). While early medieval archaeologists have long engaged in the historiography and theoretical frameworks of their study, we contend that they have neglected public archaeology as integral to their work. We should be long past regarding public engagement and its evaluation as 'extras' to our research (see Flatman 2012), let alone regarding 'outreach' simply as an avenue for funding (Almansa 2018). Instead, a critical and robust public archaeology should be seen as central to all our research endeavours, whether we are engaging with fieldwork involving community participation, discussing early medieval archaeology in schools, evaluating the Dark Age dimensions of video games and other entertainment venues, or engaging on social media about medieval matters. Spanning different scales and contrasting communities, scholarship and practice, we would contend that there is no more pressing need to tackle head-on the importance and hybridity of public archaeology than when dealing with the early medieval period: a time of intersecting prehistories and histories, complex and fluctuating peoples, practices and institutions. This, of course, involves understanding how the early medieval past fits into broader multi-period discourses on past and place, but also a specialist understanding of the particular interdisciplinary and geographical and chronologically complex ways in which early medieval archaeology has special and distinctive, powerful and problematic, relationships with contemporary society.

Furthermore, whether the dialogue with the Early Middle Ages involves touchstones of faith, political debates, or senses of community, place or identity, or challenging myths and fantasies about the past and the present, the public archaeology of the Early Middle Ages should be more inclusive of traditionally excluded groups. Thus, rather than about serving pre-existing needs, public archaeologies of the early medieval past must construct new relationships between past and present (see Belford 2014). To do this, we must operate as public intellectuals, straying outside our niche disciplinary expertise to debate how the past is presented and discussed in contemporary society, and themes linking past, present and future (cf. Tarlow and Nilsson Stutz 2013). Moreover, we must take up the challenge (recently sketched by González-Ruibal *et al.* 2018) of ensuring our archaeological research and practice *provokes* rather than simply flatters people, *teaches* them rather than indulges their fantasies, and an archaeology that escapes the ‘heritage crusade’ to explore the many intersections and meanings of archaeology in the contemporary world. In this regard, the public archaeology of the ‘Dark Ages’ should be disturbing and challenging of stereotypes and the status quo, not comforting and assuring. It should involve a variety of methods to provide ‘thick’ and rich engagement with archaeological interpretations using new methods and techniques. Finally, it should extend its focus from the preservation and management of fixed and valued resources, to consider the constantly evolving material worlds of imagined Dark Ages, thus robustly evaluate their significance in contemporary society.

Conclusion

Both in its inception as a student conference, and in its scope and character, this book might be indeed considered an example of such an approach. It is therefore striking and concerning that this is the first book dedicated to debating the reception and appropriation of early medieval material cultures and monuments in the present. In taking forward this avenue of research, we can promote and enhance the ways in which early medieval archaeologists and interdisciplinary researchers can engage with various publics and evaluate these engagements. We can all endeavour to become ‘public intellectuals’ (Tarlow and Nilsson Stutz 2013; Nilsson Stutz 2018) if not as polymath thinkers, but as passionate advocates for the responsible and data-rich engagement with early medieval pasts revealed by archaeological research. In doing so, we should seek not only to enhance how we tell our stories, but to develop new narratives as well as deploying fresh media. Whether we call it the ‘Early Middle Ages’, the ‘Anglo-Saxon period’, the ‘Dark Ages’ or any other spatio-temporal or ethnic label, the ongoing task of denouncing ‘false’ and pseudoarchaeology remains critical at this time. Yet equally important, archaeologists must work collectively to create exciting and engaging narratives that challenge existing audiences and reach out to new publics. Rather than conceding terms and territories to extremists, re-energised stories, from grand narratives down to local histories, can be mobilised by archaeologists to combat misrepresentations and appropriations of the early medieval past in robust and sensitive and sustainable fashions.

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Part 1

Dark Age Debates

Keep the Dark Ages Weird: Engaging the Many Publics of Early Medieval Archaeology

An Interview with Adrián Maldonado

As a versatile archaeological researcher exploring burial practice, stone sculpture and material culture focusing especially on early medieval Scotland as well as innovating in public engagement through his scholarship, Dr Adrián Maldonado (AM) was invited to give one of the two special guest lectures at the 'Digging into the Dark Ages' conference in December 2017. Interviewed via Skype on 5 July 2019 by Howard Williams (HW), the interview explores Dr Maldonado's career to date and his experiences of public engagement. In particular, the interview examined the challenges and potential of communicating public-facing early medieval research, the current state of public archaeology for the Early Middle Ages in Scotland, and his vision for the future of public engagement for the 'Dark Ages'. In doing so, Dr Maldonado draws on his experience and expertise in university archaeology teaching and research and in museum archaeology.

Introduction

AM: When I was invited to give one of the guest lectures at the Digging into the Dark Ages conference, I thought the most important thing I could tell students interested in early medieval archaeology was to take control of the narrative. An urgent issue of our time is the misappropriation of medieval themes and imagery by far-right groups, something I had recently spoken about in a 6-minute *pecha kucha* paper delivered to the Medieval European Research Community (MERC) meeting at the European Association of Archaeologists conference in Maastricht in September 2017 (Maldonado 2018). I jumped at the chance to expand the points made in that initial short talk into a guest lecture for students. And not only was it great fun, the conference was truly inspirational, and my hat is off to the organizers for making this a reality.

Career and research background

HW: How did you get interested in early medieval archaeology?

AM: Some people are born archaeologists and some are just terminal nerds who fall into it. Growing up in Puerto Rico, I had no real business being interested in medieval things; I was simply exposed to J.R.R. Tolkien's writing at too young of an age and it sort of ruined me. In college I chose medieval history as a degree but for some reason it didn't click with me the way I had hoped. So I did a semester abroad at St Andrews, a medieval institution in a beautiful medieval town with a ruined castle and cathedral. That experience of being among the ruins changed it from an interest in the Middle Ages in general terms to one specifically rooted in place and with time-depth. As soon as I could, I returned to Scotland in 2004 to get trained in archaeology, and entered what was then the MPhil programme in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Glasgow. I soon became a convert to early medieval everything through the dream team of lecturers including Stephen Driscoll, Colleen Batey, Ewan Campbell and Jeremy Huggett. I am still working with them today.

I came back for a PhD in 2006 to keep working through some questions one year couldn't resolve. The PhD ended up being about early medieval burial, which had never been properly synthesised for Scotland, as a way of challenging narratives of conversion as the action of a few charismatic missionaries (Maldonado 2011a). Since then I've been interested in bringing in other proxies for mortuary practice including ecclesiastical architecture and early Christian sculpture.

I've been lucky enough to find continuous work teaching or researching early medieval archaeology since completing my PhD, but it has all been on short-term postdoctoral projects, teaching cover positions, and freelance consultancy work (Figure 1). While I am approaching a decade since the PhD, I do sometimes feel like a permanently 'early career' researcher given the episodic nature of the work I've had.

Early medieval archaeology and popular culture

HW: You began with Tolkien so you were always aware of a pop culture dimension to the Early Middle Ages. When did you start to explore the intersections between early medieval archaeology and contemporary society in greater depth?

AM: I think appropriately enough it really begins with pop culture again. There was a movement around 2010/2011 called 'Love Archaeology' at the University of Glasgow. I was there when it happened, and often call myself a co-founder, though in my memory, Dr Morgana McCabe and Dr Jennifer Novotny were the instigators. The Department of Archaeology at the university was about to get merged with History; this was after the recession and it became clear that the merger was going to reduce capacity in a variety of ways for archaeology, so the Department fought it. The PhD students were all in the same room back then, regardless of what they were studying, which made us an unlikely but enthusiastic community. We decided that what we could do together should not be a 'save the department' campaign that sounded too much of a panic narrative, too negative. Instead we decided to show what archaeology does for the university and for the public. It was a range of activities, including reaching out to alumni, putting on a public event, social media activities, and coming up with new ways to get people interested in archaeology.



Figure 1: demonstrating the body-sized early medieval recumbent crosses of Iona, Argyll in the Infirmary Museum in preparations for redisplay by Historic Scotland in 2012 (Photo by Katherine Forsyth)

One of my early contributions was a fun movie review of two action thrillers which had recently come out on 'the Picts': *The Centurion* (2010) and *The Eagle* (2011), for our Facebook page (Maldonado 2011b). Before long we had started a free online magazine to host more content like this: fun, aimed at the general public, but produced by scholars. *Love Archaeology Magazine* only lived for three issues of which I edited the final one, appropriately with the archaeology of Middle-earth as the cover story (Love Archaeology 2012). LoveArch continues as a social media phenomenon and remains part of the archaeology infrastructure on various platforms.

Back in those early days, I was very aware that I had to make archaeology relevant outside of academia in order to make a living. After the PhD I also developed evening and weekend courses in what was then the Department of Adult and Continuing Education (now the Centre for Open Studies) at the University of Glasgow. My favourite was a one-day course called 'Churchspotting: How to Read a Medieval Church

in the Field'. I also ran longer modules on 'Celtic Christianity' and 'Early Medieval Scotland', which gave me critical extra teaching experience for the CV, aside from being great fun.

In 2014, when I was teaching at the University of Chester, I started the *Almost Archaeology* blog,¹ named after my favourite section of the old magazine, which I thought I would use to keep writing about pop culture. At the time I was running the HI6001 Archaeology and Contemporary Society module, which forced me to read much wider than I ever had, especially about contemporary archaeology and public archaeology. I like to think I was radicalised by this, and the blog soon grew into what it is now, covering archaeology in, of and as pop culture as commentary on contemporary society.

It has since bled into my 'day job' and I've now lectured and published on topics I first wrote about on the blog or debated on Twitter, like the archaeology of videogames and the abuse of archaeology by online journalism (Maldonado 2015a; 2016). The blog remains a sporadic outlet for me, especially as I'm now blogging for my current job,² so I am painfully conscious that just having a blog doesn't make you a public archaeologist. However, I find that I'm rarely writing for other archaeologists on AlmostArch, and I'm always gratified to see posts being circulated by 'civilians'. Having that pop culture hook is important and under-appreciated. It is a way to draw people in and talk about real issues and even sneak in real archaeological theory by speaking through things people recognise.

HW: Having a social media presence is now commonplace in the archaeological community, but does this mean that you consider yourself a 'public intellectual' or 'public-facing' academic?

AM: I love the article in *Archaeological Dialogues* addressing what constitutes a 'public intellectual' (Tarlow and Stutz 2013) and it is the killer aspiration, but when I see the amazing work colleagues are doing, I am well aware of my shortcomings here. For me, to be a 'public intellectual', you have to reach the level where you can be approached for comment on things that are not in your narrow specialism. How many archaeologists have been quoted in articles about Brexit (cf Brophy 2018)? Very few archaeologists have reached that level of trust for the public; we aren't often seen as public intellectuals even if we have the capacity to do so. I'm not sure whether we need to position archaeology differently in the public consciousness, or whether perhaps archaeologists just need more confidence. I've seen you, Howard, cross over into that realm when posts on *Archaeodeath* go viral – meaning they are being shared by those who wouldn't usually know about *Archaeodeath*: when you've addressed issues beyond archaeology, like when discussing Trump's wall (Williams 2016) and the exhumation of Richard III (Williams 2013). For my own experience, while researching perceptions of the Roman Antonine Wall (Maldonado 2015b), I blogged about Hadrian's Wall and the Picts in the context of the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 (Maldonado 2014). This has led to a few other public lectures since then, a tongue-in-cheek piece on BBC News (Allison 2017), and even a gloriously fun event for the Merchant City Festival in 2017 (Figure 2). We can continue to do that kind of thing more: comment on things that touch a nerve in a way which stands up to public scrutiny – the trust comes back onto you and your discipline. We can only benefit when we engage with things that may be rooted in archaeology but resonate with current affairs and debates, and if at all possible, allow ourselves to have fun doing it instead of always being in Serious Professor mode.

But equally, social media gives me a lot of stress. It can be very empowering in some ways, but as an academic, the race for likes and retweets can quickly come to stand in (wrongly) for 'impact'. As if academia wasn't competitive enough already, you always feel like you're coming up short, and comparing yourself to others. There is also the panic of raising your head above the parapet on a political issue, acutely for early career researchers, especially those in precarious employment to begin

¹ almostarchaeology.com

² blog.nms.ac.uk/author/amaldonado/

with. This is to say nothing of the ethical quandary of even participating on certain social media platforms, addressed with regard to archaeology educators by Colleen Morgan (2018, 2019).

HW: Let's turn to the broader situation we find ourselves in: what are the major misunderstandings of early medieval northern Britain?

AM: The Early Middle Ages couldn't be more relevant right now. A lot of nation states across Europe see their origins in the early medieval period and even take their names from early medieval ethnic groups. But I think people kind of forget the early medieval period. Many see the Middle Ages as 'castles' and 'knights', and if they see the 'Dark Ages' at all, it is in terms of the fall of empire or narrow stories of one or other ethnic group, Picts, Vikings and Anglo-Saxons. This is the greatest red herring of the discipline: how we create these people in our minds and then learn everything we can but only about this group. This has been the biggest failing of early medieval archaeology and in the current political climate when the future of these nation states is being debated, often calling back to immemorial origins, the real potential for early medieval archaeology is to show the reality of diversity in the period (Hammond 2006). Diversity might sound like a modern buzzword, but every region of early medieval Britain and Ireland was multi-lingual, multi-faith, and highly mobile. Writing textbooks about one ethnic group at a time isn't helping anybody. Equally, teaching the Dark Ages as a simple 'fall of Rome' narrative with ethnic groups as the actors has exacerbated exceptionalism and the worst kinds of nationalism (Bonacchi et al. 2018; Gardner 2017).

HW: Does our anachronistic use of modern geographical/national frameworks hold us back in this regard?

AM: Since coming to the National Museum of Scotland as Glenmorangie Research Fellow in 2018, I've had to think a lot more urgently about these kinds of issues. We are always thinking about ways in which Scotland's collections relate to the wider world. Most of our visitors are tourists and they want to learn about Scotland; but we also need to tell stories they can relate to their own experience. Likewise, people from Scotland want to know why their story is relevant outside Scotland, and that means we also have a responsibility to educate about local stories, and specific groups like the Picts. The power of a 'national' museum is the ability to put these local stories in their larger context, and avoid seeing the early medieval period as a constant battle between ethnic groups for 'supremacy'.



Figure 2: On stage at the Merchant City Festival presenting 'The Past is Pop Culture! Films about the Picts and the modern image of Scotland', Glasgow, 27 July, 2017 (Photograph: Mark Mitchell)

Luckily, there are many things about the early medieval period that are relevant globally now. The most urgent example might be climate change and its demographic effects: in the Middle Ages we have many significant climatic shifts, and we can tell stories about adaptation and failure to adapt alike. There are lessons and stories about sustainability and living in tune with your environment. Likewise, all museums have a lot of work to do to decolonise interpretation, embrace inclusivity and improve access. In my current project, studying Scotland AD 800–1200, I have taken lots of inspiration from works which decentralise the ‘Vikings’ from the ‘Viking Age’ and focus on wider socio-political changes, highlighting monetisation and the slave trade as signals of bigger shifts in the nature of personhood and value around the turn of the millennium (Raffield 2019; Samson 1991; Svanberg 2003). Archaeology can lead the way in these areas. How do we decolonise the traditional language of early medieval warlords, invasion and, worst of all, ‘population replacement’?

HW: What do you think are the most politicised dimensions in early medieval archaeology?

AM: This brings us back to the subject of my guest lecture. The mainstreaming of far-right ideologies, especially white supremacy, is the most urgent issue of our time, and future textbooks will judge us by how we dealt with it. In the last few years, the refinement of genomic sequencing and big-data techniques to carry out population-level DNA studies has spilled into archaeology, and this has quickly become the most politicised area of our discipline for a generation (Callaway 2018; Furholt 2018; Heyd 2017; Horsburgh 2015). For me this raises a variety of issues far beyond methodology; it reveals how easily we, as experts of the past, can allow ourselves to slide back into very old and increasingly dangerous tropes about population replacement as the driver of social change (Brather 2016). The notion that those in the majority or in power today are there because their ancestors were racially or culturally superior is what we must fight against.

This is the most pernicious problem because not everyone who interprets the past this way is doing it consciously. The notion of ‘progress’ of people from a primitive past was ingrained in the nineteenth-century roots of the disciplines of history and archaeology, and in Britain as elsewhere, we spent much of the twentieth century trying to get free of these conceptual barriers. Sadly, DNA almost requires the reintroduction of ugly language around ‘blood’ and ‘mixing’, with its unspoken implications about ‘purity’ and ‘dilution’ (Nash 2013). The sequencing of the human genome has led to what has been called the ‘rebiologization’ or ‘molecular reinscription’ of race (Duster 2015; Omi 2010). Science had disproven race and has now unwittingly brought it back, with supporting data so mind-bogglingly complex it makes it harder to challenge. The anxieties archaeologists have with such studies stem partly from the fact that we did not successfully kill race as a social construct, and this is proof played out in public.

It’s been a while since things have really kicked off in an archaeological conference, so the current debate is kind of invigorating, however depressing it can be at times. There are two related controversies playing out at the same time at different ends of the circles I roll in: prehistorians are battling over how best to incorporate ancient DNA (aDNA for short) in archaeology; and medievalists are up in arms over the far-right misappropriation of medieval themes. Oddly, neither debate has taken much account of the reams of work on ethnicity and ‘race’ in early medieval archaeology which would be useful here (Brather 2016; Effros 2003; Halsall 2011; Williams 2008).

My go-to early medieval example of how easily we revert to old tropes about the ‘Dark Ages’ is not from the kinds of aDNA studies which are consuming prehistorians, but the ‘People of the British Isles’ (PoBI) project, a large-scale genomic study of the modern population of the United Kingdom and Ireland. One widely publicised output claimed the current genetic profile of the UK was a direct result of early medieval migrations specifically (Leslie *et al.* 2015). A follow-up paper modelled the current population of Ireland, this time with no archaeologists involved, and came to similar conclusions but with added

problematic language around the appearance of ‘Irish’ and ‘British’ DNA in Northern Ireland (Gilbert *et al.* 2017).

More than any archaeological study of DNA, the recreational (and mainly for-profit) industry of personal genetic ancestry testing has long defaulted to medieval terminology in reporting their results (Booth 2018; Nash 2013). This is not a product of the science itself, which cannot identify any specific ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘Viking’ gene, as there is no such thing as a ‘pure’, isolated population. It is a distinct interpretative leap which actively ignores all the myriad population movements we know took place since the Middle Ages which more plausibly explain contemporary genetic clustering (Geary and Veeramah 2016). The truth is that since the 1990s several waves of DNA studies have claimed to be able to identify Pictish, Anglo-Saxon or Viking genes, and each in their turn has been challenged, only to return with the next technological advance (Brather 2016; Burmeister 2016). The general public (geneticists included!) seems fascinated with early medieval stories of migration and invasion, so it is our responsibility to tell them the complicated, less headline-grabbing, but more accurate story that culture and customs change for lots of reasons, not because one population outbred another.

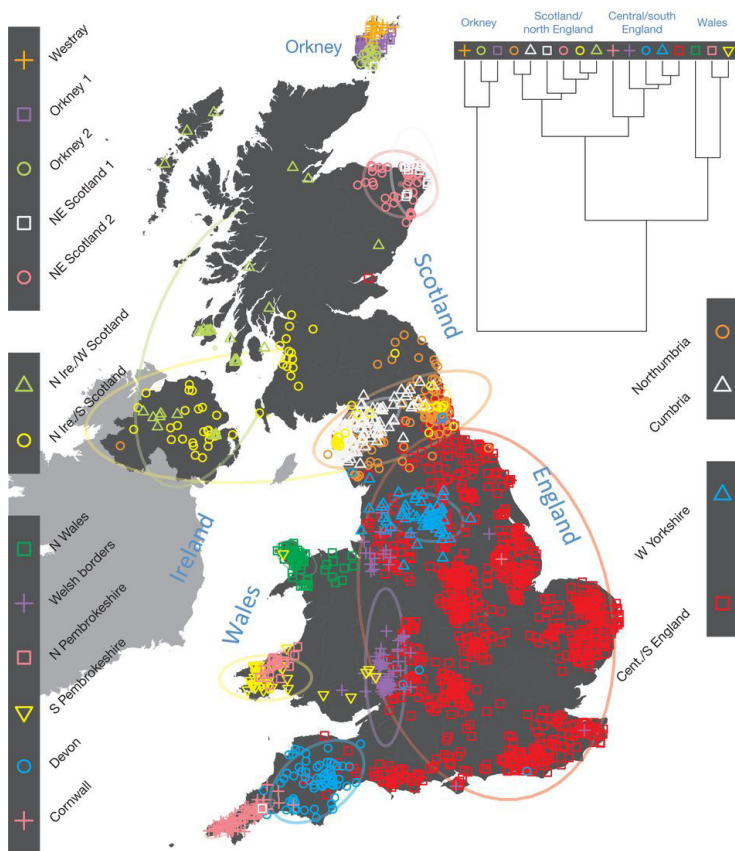


Figure 3: colour-coded clusters of relatedness according to modern DNA samples; note the patchy coverage across Scotland compared to other parts of the UK. Reprinted by permission from Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH: © Nature 2015 (Leslie *et al.* 2015: 310, figure 1)

And so it was depressing, if not surprising, that the main takeaway of PoBI (Leslie *et al.* 2015) – parroted by numerous newspapers – was ‘there is no Celtic gene’ (as if this was a reasonable expectation to begin with). More troublingly, this was demonstrated with a map of genetic clusters which strongly implied that there was an ‘Anglo-Saxon gene’ (Figure 3). Never mind this was achieved with a wonky sampling strategy in which, to take just two examples, the Highlands of Scotland were represented by four individuals, and the reference population of ‘Denmark’ by patients of a single hospital in Copenhagen (Kershaw and Royrvik 2016; Nash 2013).³

It felt distinctly like the old debate over the term ‘Celts’ which consumed anglophone archaeologists in the 1990s (Sims-Williams 1998), but now ‘enhanced’ with science. Those who sought to remove ‘Celts’ from the lexicon had different reasons for doing so, some more justifiable than others, but in hindsight it is difficult to dissociate the ferocity of the debate from the political arguments over the legitimacy of modern Celts and devolution of parliamentary powers in 1997. The

³ An update with a larger Scottish dataset was published as this book went to publication (Gilbert *et al.* 2019). I shared a capsule review, touching on themes relevant to this discussion, on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaldon/status/1169537407726817280>

resurfacing of these tropes in the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 makes them extremely problematic. Deconstructing ethnicity is a global project, not a selective one, but it seems we are quicker to problematise Celts than the identities they are so often defined against, be they Anglo-Saxons, Romans or Vikings.

HW: What do you consider important the relationship between the identity of the practitioner and the identity of past people: diversity present and past?

The biggest advantage of studying the Dark Ages is a sort of 'brand recognition'. People in the anglophone world instinctually know what you mean when you say Dark Ages, Anglo-Saxons, Picts, Scots, Vikings, Christians – all are part of a shared foundation mythology. This is great: we have an in-built hook that other periods would kill for – no such luck for the Chalcolithic! Outreach is to a certain extent already baked into the cake for what we do.

At the same time, this exact advantage is the biggest risk. The problem is that people still live in places called 'Scotland' and 'England' or claim kinship with 'Vikings' or 'Celts', and so preconceived notions and historical baggage all need to be unpacked before we even start talking. Changing the foundational narratives of a society does not always go down well. There can be a confusion between then and now – Christianity is a particularly tricky example I have to deal with regularly. We have to establish the connection between past and present, but we have a responsibility to show dissonance and otherness; and the relevance comes from this difference, not as much from the 'they were like us' approach. The jarring realization of time passing is the only way to actually learn anything from the past.

Public archaeology in early medieval Scotland

HW: What would you say are the current strengths of public archaeological research and community archaeology projects, specifically related to early medieval northern Britain?

AM: Because I deal with early medieval church archaeology, there's a series of case studies where communities around churches have activated their heritage well beyond the 'Christian story'. The Whithorn excavations (Hill 1997) were carried out by the Whithorn Trust, formed to fund and care for the archaeology of the site. They continue to do so today, and are responsible for one of the most fun public-facing projects I've ever worked on, Cold Case Whithorn, applying new scientific techniques to the human remains from the early medieval cemetery.⁴

Likewise, Martin Carver's work at Portmahomack is another example: the excavations at this early monastery involved the local stakeholders from the start, partially funding the excavation with the express purpose of transforming their redundant church into a museum to benefit the local economy (Carver et al. 2016). The Tarbat Discovery Centre still displays the results today.⁵

But while both these ventures are still active, they have weathered near-fatal financial hardships in the intervening years, especially since the recession, as they are dependent on visitor numbers. Both have survived through the tireless work of unpaid and underpaid community heroes who run them.

To take a third early Christian example, the remarkable collection of Viking-age carved stones housed at Govan Old Parish Church in Glasgow have required a different response. Small-scale excavations were undertaken in the 1990s by Stephen Driscoll, which resulted in remarkable evidence for an early church and ditched enclosure (Driscoll 2004). His research also highlighted the lost Moot Hill, an

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/coldcasewhithorn/>

⁵ <http://tarbat-discovery.co.uk/>

outdoor assembly site which was long ago obliterated by modern development. The recognition of the great loss of that monument through Driscoll's research and outreach has been strangely galvanising, and the project has gone from preserving local heritage to full-blown urban regeneration in a severely deprived former shipyard (Butler *et al.* 2013). Driscoll's sustained relationship with the church and the community since then extended well beyond the excavations, impacting on major planning developments, influencing urban infrastructure including the reinstatement of the historic ferry across the Clyde. 'The Govan Stones' has latterly become a ticketed tourist attraction, but the community was and remains the focus.⁶

Reflections on the future of the public archaeology of the Early Middle Ages

HW: Is there anything we need to do more or less of in the future as public archaeologists of the Early Middle Ages? We can't do everything with limited funds, so do we need to tone down some strategies to invest in others?

AM: I have railed here against the fragmentation of the discipline down ethnic lines. But this is not the case for dissolving all specialisms. We will always need experts, including specialists in artefact type and local heritage, and no one should apologise for being one. The funding regimes and academic Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessments we're subject to in Britain stress the need for 'world class' research and international impact which can seem difficult to square with this kind of knowledge. But we need the particular and the local now more than ever in the age of big data (Burmeister 2016; Furholt 2018). I will come back here to problematic aDNA studies. As noted with the large-scale projects based on contemporary populations, there are always biases in coverage, because there is no (and can never be) 'pure' representative population, now or in the past. Even if we sampled every early medieval skeleton ever excavated in Britain, it would still not give us a representative sample of 'Britain's DNA' because there are always differences in the timing and tempo of burial as recoverable by archaeologists. Some regions of western and northern Britain never have more than a handful of known burial sites throughout the early medieval period. When the data analysts in these projects filter and flatten out 'noise' to come up with tighter clusters or more coherent differences between people, what they are doing is deleting the humanity they are purporting to have the truth about.

So my argument to the students was not to shy away from headline-grabbing developments like the genomic revolution, but rather the opposite. The best recent writers on this all agree that the answer is not less engagement with geneticists, but more. Archaeologists need to start thinking of biologists and geneticists as equal partners, and find better ways to work together at formulating the right questions (Booth 2019; Burmeister 2016; Furholt 2018; Geary and Veeramah 2016; Heyd 2017; Samida and Feuchter 2016).

There are now models of how to do this kind of work in partnership with biologists, using aDNA in combination with stable isotope analysis, anthropological research on kinship, and, critically, sensitivity to the historiography of the field (Amorim *et al.* 2018; Schiffels *et al.* 2016). I've come to realize that this latter area might be the most crucial. Knowing how the field has come to be the way it is today is crucial to knowing where to go next, and where we have gone wrong in the past, so we don't repeat the same fallacies. Where haven't we looked? Why haven't we asked certain questions? And for the early medieval period specifically – why, with every new technological advance, do we keep reverting back to population replacement as a model for cultural change?

Another critical thing to invest in is what you might call 'media training' or just explaining oneself succinctly without sacrificing accuracy. Teachers, get your students to practice writing press-release-

⁶ <http://www.thegovanstones.org.uk/>

length summaries of archaeological research (Killgrove 2014: 39; Maldonado 2016). Practice explaining complexity, don't try to smooth it over. Archaeologists are often portrayed in the media as 'stumbling' onto something unexpected, when the reality is that to get to the stage of carrying out an excavation, teams of people with years of experience need to collaborate. Bring people into the progress – rather than turning people off, you'll find that the public (including scientists in other disciplines!) appreciate the work that has gone into the latest 'discovery', and this all builds trust. Double-down on DNA, and bend it to our will. We can test the DNA not just of humans but of livestock, of food items, of tree species used for tools and architecture. We can combine genetic analysis with post-human approaches to help us decouple 'blood' and identity.

Conclusion

AM: Finally, reflecting back on what drew me personally into this strange corner of the discipline, I think it was the feeling I got reading Tolkien as a child, of a world strangely recognizable and realistic for all its dragons and elves. It is a world that was problematic but which rewards revisiting and constant critique. Learn from its flaws. We must not try to remake it in our image. My advice for the future, for both our research and our public engagement: keep the Dark Ages weird.

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Colouring the Dark Ages: Perceptions of Early Medieval Colour in Popular Culture

Anne Sassin

Representations of the Early Middle Ages, still commonly perceived of as the 'Dark Ages', have been traditionally hampered by pre-conceptions tied to its very name. This chapter aims to elucidate the uses of colour and light in the material and visual culture of the early medieval period before identifying trends in its perception in recent and current popular culture. Focusing on heritage displays, images deployed in children's literature and educational resources, and filmic and televisual representations, the chapter argues that, despite recent academic research and innovative developments in public archaeology, the Early Middle Ages still remains largely bland in terms of colour in popular perception.

Introduction: popular perceptions of a colourless 'Dark Ages'

Despite the rich evidence available from early medieval archaeological and historical evidence, there is a persistent trend in the 21st-century reception of the Early Middle Ages to trivialise and understate early medieval palettes and their impact on their contemporary worlds. This impulse not only strives to mute and devalue the tones of the 'Dark Ages', but has attempted a relegation of colour to the cosmetic or supplemental levels, and at times endeavoured to openly purge its presence (see Batchelor 2000; Duckworth and Sassin 2017: 1–8). These prejudices are also commonly reflected in responses to brightly coloured (or even 'garish', in the words of some critics) reconstructions of famous ancient monuments, whether the Parthenon temple or various classical statues (Reed 2007), or those of the medieval era, e.g. the wall paintings of St Teilo's, Llandeilo Tal-y-bont (Organ 2011). Although token appreciation might be made of the more accurate nature of the brightly painted surfaces, versus the bare and natural masonry, approval is often reserved, if not lacking entirely. One almost wishes to read a sarcastic tone in statements, such as Richard Bailey's, in relation to pre-Conquest sculpture, that 'their original appearance relied little on the tasteful reticence of natural stone; these were once hideously polychrome monuments' (Bailey 1996: 33). The barbarian otherness of the Early Middle Ages, as well as perhaps the default presumption of the ubiquitous 'whiteness' of its people, are perpetuated by this derogatory attitude towards its material and visual cultures: both a tendency to portraying a drab Dark Ages, or else dismissing its vibrant and diverse colour schemes.

In this context, the challenge for our research and public engagement is how we critique these embedded contemporary perceptions, beyond the 'lighting the Dark Ages' media cliché for our new discoveries and insights. Certainly, studies of colour itself – at least for the medieval period – have striven to overcome such biases in recent years and disentangle modern assumptions from the evidence actually presented in the material culture (Huxtable and O'Donnell 2017), but difficulties in trying to define contemporary perceptions and subsequent expressions of colour are apparent for most cultures and periods, let alone a 'Dark Age' named so for its very lack of sources. Naturally, ideas developed over the first millennium, particularly in the field of optics (for instance the tenth-century Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen) who advanced the notion that vision was the result of the light rays entering the eye (Duckworth and Sassin 2017: 2). Yet, it is clear that we need to advance both our appreciation of colour in early medieval societies, as well as critical evaluations of their popular receptions.

Colour in the Early Middle Ages

Terminology represents a significant barrier to investigating early medieval colour. A linguistic theory on basic colour terms, published in 1969 (Berlin and Kay), proposed the various stages of development

for colour terms, but its focus on hue and limitations in considering other qualities such as luminosity and brightness have since led to alternative proposals (Conklin 1973; Jameson and D'Andrade 1997). The model did, however, highlight a persistent focus on the more 'extreme' and most basic colours of black, white and red, particularly for the more 'primitive' or prehistoric societies (Jones and Bradley 1999), and stands as a useful starting point for qualifying (and quantifying) contemporary terms.

Specific attempts at colour classification for Anglo-Saxon England have also recognised the dangers of over-reliance on the hues of the Munsell system alone, rather than brightness and the light-dark opposition which the Old English system mainly stressed (Barley 1974: 16-17). The sources have long been subject to critical and cautious evaluation (e.g. Lapidge and Dumville 1984), yet challenges remain in reading too literally into terminology employed by writers of the time, and the absence of a colour term should of course not be taken as evidence for the lack of either the creation or perception of the colour itself. For example, writing in the early 8th century (c. 731), the Venerable Bede records shellfish containing pearls of 'several colours, red, purple, violet, and green, but mainly white', while whelks were common from which 'beautiful scarlet dye' was extracted which was '...unfaded by sunshine or rain; indeed, the older the cloth, the more beautiful its colour' (HE I.1). Many writers, such as Eddius Stephanus in his eighth-century account of the founding of Ripon, emphasised the golden sheen and brilliance of precious metals and the material connection to the décor of early churches and the temples of the Old Testament (Dodwell 1982: 33). We struggle, however, to discern how colour and reflectivity, as well as the symbolic associations with particular materials, were perceived in the Early Middle Ages, let alone in ancient times (see e.g. Aulsebrook 2017; Saunders 2002).

As pointed out by Nigel Barley (1974: 21) in his work on Old English colour classification, in some instances 'appearance' was a better translation than 'colour' for some terms, as colours were often attributes whose terms originated as comparative referents, e.g. 'blood-red'. Often in Bede's writings, the stated hue of an object is left vague ('magnificent' or 'bright' robes, HE I.17, HE IV.2; even a valuable jewel whose only description is the 'brilliant light' emitted, HE IV.23), rather than providing more thorough narratives of the colours portrayed. This may of course be due to the second (or more)-hand nature of the account, as more detailed descriptions belong to others whom Bede references, e.g. Adamnan's writing on Jerusalem, where 'the colour of the Tomb of the Sepulchre is a mingled white and red' (HE V.16), or the epitaph for Wilfred at Ripon, which lists 'fair gold and purple vestments' and Gospels 'cased in covers of red gold' (HE V.19). Yet the detail of the latter could also reflect the esteem and liturgical importance these colours all held (Dodwell 1982: 36-37), noteworthy for their prestige as well as their hue.

Often, colour references were restricted in Bede to necessary distinctions, for instance his remark that an Ethiopian in a wall painting at Wearmouth should not be portrayed with white skin, nor conversely should an Anglo-Saxon be with black (Gem 1990: 1-6), rather than providing enhancing descriptions to the imagery. They are also known for being derivative of earlier sources, including Gildas (DEB), making it possible that some of the colour references are borrowed. However, the higher occurrence of the brighter hues in the texts – namely white, red and purple – which would stand out for their comparative uncommonness, or status in the case of some garments or garnishings, is notable. The natural tones of the rivers, fields and woodlands and everyday structures and objects of domestic life do not warrant mention, as they lack the same allure and standing.

In Old English poetry, the most common colour by far is black – a frequency that is expressed through a multitude of terms, e.g. *blæc*, *deorc*, *dun*, *sweart*, *wann*, etc – followed by white, emphasising a light and dark contrast which defined the colour system, rather than the hues which we focus on today (Barley 1974: 17). This follows a similar trend in Latin, with the basic terms for black and white coming in doublets, possibly indicating differing levels of luminosity or shine, e.g. *niger* and *candidus* as the shiny terms versus the matte *ater* and *albus* (Gering 2014: 6; also see Bradley 2011). Clearly, light and dark

contrasts – and any allegorical meanings hidden within – feature prominently in the written works and reflect a fascination with brightness which is echoed in the material culture.

While no direct and simple comparison can be afforded, there is no clear evidence that early medieval writers were less attentive to colour than classical ones. For instance, *The Agricola* by Tacitus, the first of the detailed accounts of the British Isles and written at the end of the 1st century AD, is limited in its relevant references, with physical and character traits such as green old age (*Agr.* Book XXX) and blood-red countenance (XLV) making up the majority of the limited colour allusions, a trend towards connotative rather than purely colour terms that might be seen in earlier Classical texts (e.g. *viridis* for ‘ripe’ or ‘fresh’ in Cato’s *De Agri Cultura*; see Gering 2014: 11).

In the late 12th-century writings of Gerald of Wales, references to ‘gold’ and ‘golden’ are more prominent than other colour descriptions. However, Gerald is the first to express and even celebrate the natural beauty of the landscape and its greenness, with five mentions overall: the bright-green of Brecknock Mere (*Itin.* I.2) or the greenness of fields (*Itin.* II.2; *Desc.* I.10), with even the pitch-black bark of the soils (*Itin.* I.13) or the ‘golden sheen’ of cliffs (*Itin.* I.5) alluded to. This attentiveness to the natural world may be credited as much to the first-hand nature of his narrative, as any changing ethos by this time, but the shift away from the polemic tone of the earlier writings is noted.

It is clear that, in addition to the many challenges of inference, there is no *a priori* assumption, based on the written sources, to presume that ‘Dark Age’ writers were less attentive to colour in their daily lives, even if their accounts were often led by agendas beyond mere detailed accounts of their surroundings. Materials with particular value – whether fabric, precious metals or minerals – were clearly prized, as were the hues associated with them, and the powerful contrast of light and dark which figured prominently was steeped in metaphor and went far beyond basic black and white distinction and classification. The power and influence of the church cannot be understated in this thinking, and to this we must focus further discussion where material and visual evidence, while inevitably fragmentary, gives us many additional clues.

Colour in early medieval churches

Even with local guidebooks (e.g. Bott 2000) and church websites (Llanilltud 2019) it is now commonly recognised that many medieval churches, in addition to having once had timber predecessors, were not the largely naked stone walls of today, but may have once been ornately adorned with richly decorated furnishings. The scale of this opulence obviously differed within the various classes of church, as well as regionally, and the few accounts of this wealth and splendour, such as Cogitosus’ likely mid-7th-century description of the linen curtains and tapestries, painted tablets and (possible) frescoes, gold and silver chandeliers and overall ‘variety of carvings and colours’ at Kildare in Ireland (VB XXXII.i) are often assumed to be a departure from the normal wooden structures of the time (Harbison 1999: 192–193). However, the requirement set down at the Council of Chelsea in 816 which stated that a consecrating bishop should ensure the dedicatee of the church is *depictum* on the wall, *tabula* or altars (Higgitt 1990: 38; Cather *et al.* 1990b: ix) might indicate that, certainly by the middle Anglo-Saxon period, wall painting and other depictions might not have been exceptional.

It is now recognised that, in the early years of the study of wall painting, Anglo-Saxon/pre-Conquest material was significantly overlooked during investigations (Mitchell 1990: 126–127; for more about problems surrounding recognition of early medieval paint, see Cather *et al.* 1990a). The use of colour for early medieval church walls is now assumed to have been common, even if the more costly colours such as lapis lazuli were limited to the conspicuous display of the cathedrals (Cather *et al.* 1990b: iii–iv, ix). For instance, C.R. Dodwell (1982: 92–93, 226–227) has stressed the sumptuousness of Anglo-Saxon

painting, and certainly colour could be achieved in multiple ways, including through the plaster itself, such as the ‘pink cement’ of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow (Cramp and Cronyn 1990: 25) or bright white of the gypsum at Breedon-on-the-Hill (Cather *et al.* 1990b: xii).

Painting was of course not limited to the walls, but also known to adorn the stone carvings of the day. Again, most of the physical examples come from the 10th and 11th centuries (see Lang 1990; Tweddle 1990), though documentary evidence suggests that carvings from as early as the 8th century were painted, e.g. the Madonna effigy at Lindisfarne (Dodwell 1982: 121), with traces of red, yellow, white and black pigment on the late eighth-century Lichfield Angel (Hawkes *et al.* 2008), reddish-brown on the c. AD 800 Hilton of Cadboll stone (James *et al.* 2008), and bands of red, yellow and blue on a 9th-century capital from St Augustine’s Abbey (Tweddle *et al.* 1995: 131). As with wall paintings, techniques could vary, and be as simple as the picking-out of letters, as in the red paint on the 10th/11th-century cross from All-Hallows-by-the Tower, London (Tweddle 1990: 150–151). However, it was also common to paint the background in a different colour to throw the image forward and act as a relief foil, e.g. the carvings at Deerhurst and Romsey from the same period (Rodwell 1990: 166), or the runic-inscribed grave marker from St Paul’s whose deep indigo coating followed Scandinavian schemes where the dominantly black background was complemented by red (and occasionally yellow and white) lettering (Tweddle 1990: 151; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1980: 139; Marxen and Moltke 1981).

In terms of the colours themselves, red appears to be the most common one used for inscriptions, both for being painted onto plain plaster and for the letters inscribed on the stone (Higgitt 1990: 36–38). Indeed if the pigment was not red, it was often a tint or shade of it, and though there is speculation that only such mineral-based pigments survived in the main (Lang 1990: 135), lumps of haematite from Coppergate further support its frequency of use (Tweddle 1990: 152). Therefore, the popularity of red, featuring prominently in Roman Britain, particularly on stone monuments where it was utilised on inscriptions, for example Caerleon (Boon 1970: 36), endured into Anglo-Saxon times and grew to a strong interest, if not passion, for the hue, which extended not only to the clothing worn, but to its precious stones, enamels and even metals (with its bronze ‘unusually red’ according to Reginald of Durham; Dodwell 1982: 37).

Despite this reddish preference, and our notions of a limited colour range for the period, the palette employed was much more substantial and included white, black, blackish, red, dark red, reddish brown, pink, yellow, cream, grey-brown, green, blue and purple. Though a somewhat limited number of pigments (haematite, ochres, likely carbon black), these could be overlapped or mixed into a much greater variation of hues, potentially even blue itself (Cather *et al.* 1990b: xiv–xv; for discussion of blue in this period and particularly the effect of ‘false blue’ see Howard 1990). Blue, green and purple are harder to identify in terms of their creation, for instance distinguishing the costly late antique ‘imperial purple’ murex dye which was obtained from whelks and reflected in the literature from the ochre mixed with lime which was substituted for authentic colourant (Cather *et al.* 1990b: xv). Nonetheless, more ambitious attempts at colouring occurred, as with the considerable green background (possibly verdigris) on the 10th-century probable altar slab from Penrith, Cumbria (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 140–142; Lang 1990: 140), or 9th-century cross-shaft and head fragments from Reculver, whose elaborate polychromatic scheme consisted of a red background with dark blue figural draperies, combined with probable metal appliqué and glass inlays (Tweddle 1990: 148–149). Indeed, the latter reference may have been a common feature, with metalwork attachments, as well as glass, paste and jewelled adornments, giving the already highly coloured carvings metallic and jewelled hues and overall transforming them into virtual metal crosses (Bailey 1996: 34, 43).

Another reference of Bede’s which has seen much (possibly mis-)interpretation was the importation of Frankish glass-makers to Monkwearmouth to teach glazing to the English who were unacquainted with the skill (HAAB V: 368), and other 7th- and 8th-century texts alluding to glass at York Minster,

Lindisfarne and possibly Wareham in Sussex might cast doubt on this assertion (Dodwell 1982: 63–64; Yorke 1995: 186). Early medieval window glass is not known for its vivid colours, as stained glass itself is largely a phenomenon of the 12th century onwards. However, excavations at Glastonbury attest to the production of late 7th-century window glass (Graves 2015; Willmott and Welham 2013), with sherds from Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, which date to the 9th century or earlier, typical of the western tradition of glassmaking in its varied shades of blue, green, turquoise, amber, yellow-brown and red (Cramp 1970; 1976).

Colour was also clearly present in other features of the churches and could be manipulated to different effects than mere brightness of hue. The contrast of light with dark, for instance, has been suggested with ivory figures, many of which were not painted in order to stand-out from their more ‘sumptuous’ surroundings with their whiteness, although there were still of course exceptional pieces such as the *Christ in Majesty* at the Victoria and Albert Museum whose scheme of blue, red, gold, pink and green colour was employed with great precision, down to the gold of the footstool and pink of the lips (Backhouse et al 1984: cat. no. 123; Williamson and Webster 1990: 178–180). Darker tones might also achieve this effect, as in polychromatic glazed floor tiles, which though mostly late Saxon were common at all of the major sites (Bury St Edmunds, Canterbury, Coventry, Oxford, St Albans, Winchester, York). Although the colour scheme was rarely vivid, glazing as in the reddish-brown tiled floor at St Frideswide, Oxford (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1988), in combination with the glazed windows, paintings and embroidered hangings suggested from either excavations or literature (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1990: 74–76; Heighway 1990: 81–82), would add a vibrant ambience to a room through its reflective surface.

Reflectivity was particularly important in the churches of the period, as the cadence of light and dark played a central role not only in aesthetics but in theology as well, and the occasional lack of distinction between reflected and emitted light even led to reflective materials being credited with light production (see Borsook 2000; Ivanovici 2017). The artificial lighting – largely a combination of lamps and candles – would have varied considerably from site to site, and the flickering effect of candles and impact they would have had during rituals, whether when lit or extinguished (e.g. Gittos 2015: 113, 197, 230), would have been powerful. Sunlight, though less controllable, was similarly powerful when manipulated, and natural lighting – which was often limited to small opening in the early stone churches – would have been carefully positioned to emphasise key focal points, such as the alters, with early medieval Irish churches particularly sparing in the number and size of window openings, perhaps to create an atmosphere that diverged as much as possible from the worldly spaces outside (O’Carragáin 2009: 133). It is not difficult to visualise how the lighting and changing times of day could affect perceptions of the coloured surfaces and objects, particularly those with glossy or reflective sheens.

Finally, no discussion of the use of colour in early churches should fail to mention manuscript illumination, items which perhaps did not make a common appearance to the congregation, but which would have had a profound impact on the viewer through the imagery conveyed. Much study of the technical analysis of pigments focuses on manuscripts of the Romanesque (see Petzold 1995; Clarke 2001), but fully painted miniatures (often with the addition of gold and silver leaf) and outline drawing in colour are certainly known from late Antiquity. Not least of these is the extraordinary decorative scheme of the early eighth-century Lindisfarne Gospels, in which a relatively limited number of pigments were combined to produce an exceptionally wide range of shades (Brown 2003: 281), a colour array which has been argued as even symbolic of the harmonious concord of the gospels (Pulliam 2013: 56). The text itself could also be embellished with colour in order to make select sections stand-out, whether alternating the colours for the beginning lines of verse, or the practice of ‘rubrication’ in which tiny drops of red lead were used to form outlines and backgrounds. Like Lindisfarne, many of the most famous colourful manuscripts of this period were Insular, produced either in Ireland (such as the earlier eighth-century St Gall Gospels) or deriving from Iona (e.g. the Books of Durrow and Kells; see for instance Henderson 1987). However, ideas and styles would have been exchanged and drawn on media

from a wide-ranging network, and certainly by the 10th century, Anglo-Saxon masterpieces such as the Benedictional of Æthelwold, known for its lavish application of gold (Wormald 1959), or early 11th-century Harley Psalter, which was one of the first to feature coloured outlines (Backhouse 1984), were being produced.



Figure 1: A 7th-century gold plated disc brooch from Saltwood cemetery, Kent, set with garnets, blue glass and gold-wire filigree (Photo by Walter (Jo) Ahmet, copyright Kent County Council)

With the combination of architectural fittings and more portable objects – manuscripts, metalwork, ivories and textiles – it is clear that many of the early medieval churches were colourful affairs, though what evidence is available prior to the 7th century is still largely to be uncovered, even in the ‘Celtic West’ where Christianity did not die-out with the Anglo-Saxon incursions. This was certainly the case with illuminated manuscripts, as the early decoration did not begin until the late 6th or 7th century and even then was limited to the simplest range (for instance the black, yellow and red in the Cathach ‘battler’ of St Columba; Alexander 1978: 28–29), only transitioning into the vivacious hues of the Books of Kells and other works in the eighth-century ‘Golden Age’ (see Megaw and Megaw 2001). Neither do the inscribed and sculptured stones show much evidence for colour application in their immediately post-Roman phases, with the earliest 9th-century in date; however the lack of surviving colour is more often than not attributed to over-cleaning and exposure to the elements, and the assumption by many scholars and curators is that most, if not all, would have been painted in some fashion at one time (Redknap and Lewis 2007: 127).

Colour and the quotidian

We know little about the colours that adorned secular architectures, inside and out, in the Early Middle Ages, yet dress accessories, brooches and necklaces afford us with a sense that clothing could incorporate vibrant striking and lustrous polychrome designs (see for instance Hines and Bayliss 2013). The more famous pieces are naturally the most brilliant both in terms of colour range and in the intricacy of the details, such as the early 7th-century Kingston brooch, which is considered one of the finest of all the Kentish composite designs, with blue glass and white shell supplementing the overall carpet effect of gold and garnet (Kendrick 1939; Laing and Laing 1979: 31–34), a colour scheme which so commonly dominates the style, e.g. the Monkton (Hawkes 1974; Laing and Laing 1979: 34–35) or Saltwood brooches (Figure 1). This overwhelming preference for gold and garnet for elite personal display from the 6th and 7th centuries is famously known from the Mound 1 Sutton Hoo assemblage (Bruce-Mitford 1975), and in the more recently discovered Staffordshire Hoard, where a conservator’s project blog entitled ‘three

years in red and gold' best epitomises the colour arrangement (Fern *et al.* 2019; Magnoler 2014). By the same token, the contemporary Insular metalwork of western Britain largely followed a similar red, yellow and occasionally blue arrangement with its additional enamel and millefiori inlays (Redknap 2000: 66, 85–87), a somewhat limited but clearly favoured colour-palette.

Though it is the jewellery, rather than the cloth itself, which survives, the evidence for brightly coloured wool textiles, silk and other garments is strong, based on both documentary and archaeological evidence. There is little evidence for the use of colour on clothing in the early Anglo-Saxon graves, though this admittedly may reflect a lack of survival, and dyes only really become more prominent in the late 6th to 7th century, including madder for red which, due to its prestige, would still have been limited; in the earlier period these would have been largely collected from the wild – except for woad which was cultivated – and were therefore more sparing (Walton Rogers 2014: 256, 262; see also Biggam 2006 on the use of whelk dyes). Though it can be presumed that the more opulent hues were most utilised by those of greater standing, more plain earthy tones would also have been worn, with more than one reference to animal furs for garments, including gowns (Dodwell 1982: 173–175). As these would also have been worn in combination with brooches, dress pins and other goldwork – or in the case of pre-seventh century jewellery, amber and brightly coloured glass beads (Tweddle 1990: 154) – it can be assumed that even everyday wear would have had a good-sized palette range. Often, the best documented colours were not the most common, but the most costly, such as *purpura*, the enigmatic term which could refer to both the colour and the gleaming fabric which in fact did not even have to be a purple hue (Dodwell 1982: 145–150). At Coppergate alone, traces of woad (blue), madder (red), lichen purple and kermes (red) have been found on textiles, with traces of madder, greenweed (yellow) and clubmoss (blue, yellow or green) also found on site (Hall 1983: 25; Walton Rogers 1997).

Discussion: placing colour in the 'Dark Age'

Colour schemes of church and quotidian arenas undoubtedly cross-fertilised and evolved in complex ways during the early medieval period, with inter-relationships between materials and media, and inspirations drawn from the Continent and Scandinavia as well as the material and cultural inheritance of the Roman past. For example, the pink plasters so common in wall painting have also been suggested as a derivative of the Roman tradition of adding brick dust to plasters, as recommended by Vitruvius and as seen in the *opus signinum* floors of both monastic sites (Cramp and Cronyn 1990: 25–26), whilst letters carved on stone – particularly when painted in red – suggest clear Mediterranean links (Higgitt 1990: 36–38). Perhaps the most common link made with Roman colour is the use and status of *purpura* and purple, probably the most controversial colour with a diverse set of meanings and overtones (Bradley 2011: 34), a status which continued in the Byzantine world – not least being 'born in the purple' – and even manifested in stone, as seen in red porphyry or 'solidified purple' which linked luminosity with imperial wealth (Ivanovici 2017: 82). As with the silk (*purpura*), which was costly and took on a status of distinction, the colour purple held particular meaning to the Anglo-Saxons, through its representation of power, the Church and empire. The colour and the cloth, however, were not one and the same, and in fact there could be many 'shades' of *purpura* (white, green, red), making its definition not by its colour, but its actual gleam and glowing effect, perhaps a derivation of its Roman name – *purpureus* – which was used to describe the glittering effects of light. A possible 7th-century account of St Cuthbert's translation likely refers to it as a purple cloth variegated by strands of yellow, and it was acclaimed for creating a constantly changing effect as it caught the light (Dodwell 1982: 36–37, 145–150), suggesting that the real value was in the lustre, rather than purple hue.

While early medieval art styles included many abstract and zoomorphic forms that are often crudely contrasted with 'antique' art's naturalistic dimensions, the colours of nature do feature in the literature, as for instance in the suggested use of horse and other animal hides for Old English colour terms, the same term which ends up being applied to metal as much as the gleaming animal hides, due to the

glossy quality of both (Barley 1974: 24). In turn, the role of developments in the early medieval period on later medieval practices, including with colour systems and decorative applications, cannot be underestimated. Arguments have been made that early medieval metalwork, certainly in the Insular world, influenced the colour schemes which were employed by the first manuscript painters (Youngs 1995), with colourants in enamels similar in many instances to those used in the Book of Durrow. The pigments on much of the aforementioned sculpture for the most part also paralleled those known in such masterpieces as the Lindisfarne Gospels (Redknap and Lewis 2007: 128). Although we must be careful with too much emphasis on progressive modelling, with origins in many techniques from the classical period onwards, what is clear is that there is no evidence to suggest a hiatus in colourants in the early medieval period, despite portrayals to the contrary.

In summary, multiple strands of evidence show us that the 'Dark Ages' were a time of rich and complex colour systems deployed on dress, material culture and the built environment. Having sketched this



Figure 2: Painted replica of 10th-century cross-shaft from Neston, Cheshire (Photograph by Howard Williams)



Figure 3: Former exhibits highlighting Anglo-Saxon fashions and customs from Sutton Hoo and West Stow, Suffolk, featuring (a) a reconstruction of the 7th-century burial of King Raedwald at Sutton Hoo (note this photo is of the 2016 display which has since been replaced), and (b,c) a fashion display from West Stow Anglo Saxon Village (Photographs by Howard Williams, used with kind permission from the National Trust and West Suffolk Council)



Figure 4: Viking Age colour palette, demonstrating the range of hues and shades that would have been available in the early medieval period and developed in a joint collaboration between the National Museum of Denmark and Sagnlandet Lejre, Historical-Archaeological Research & Communication Centre (Photo by Roberto Fortuna)

evidential basis, we can now turn to the disconnections with popular perceptions, pursuing three related but distinctive subject areas: heritage sites and museums, children's literature and educational resources, and filmic and televisual portrayals.

Depictions in today's heritage

Exhibitions specifically on colour are not unknown in museums, though perhaps more at home in the science or natural history categories, rather than other more culture-specific genres. Scientists and artists often offer a useful combination in creating exhibits which reflect individual experiences with colour, and the Natural History Museum's 2016 'Colour and Vision Exhibition' was no exception, with a variety of exhibits illustrating everything from how we react to certain colours (for instance red) to image projection and the workings of the human eye (Hendry 2016). Attempting to reconstruct early

medieval monuments in their original painted schemes is no longer unusual or even new, particularly in Scandinavia, where painted Bronze Age rock art preceded the Viking Age Gotland picture-stones (Lindqvist 1941). In Britain, the National Museum of Wales undertook their experimental colouring of their plaster-casts as far back as the 1970s, sticking largely to earth colours such as red and ochre on the white plaster, but also occasionally venturing out to green (*Amgueddfa* 1971; Redknap and Lewis 2007: 129). For the most part, the colour is subtly applied and by no means shocking in its effect (see for instance the alternating red and green scheme on the ninth-century pillar-cross from Penally (Redknap 1991: 63), perhaps accounting for why this largely early and innovative experimental reconstruction escaped the scathing critique other exhibitions (e.g. ‘Gods in Color’; see Talbot 2018) have been the recipients of. However, bolder colour representations are becoming increasingly common, particularly with Anglo-Scandinavian designs, as with the replica model of the 10th century cross at Neston in Cheshire (Figure 2).

Most early medieval galleries, particularly in the British Museum, for instance Room 41: ‘Sutton Hoo and Europe, AD 300–1100’, or the recent special exhibits on the Vikings (in 2014) and Celts (2016), though substantial in terms of the importance of the artefacts displayed, are rather traditional in their presentation and decor: white, grey and clear glass only slightly off-set by the occasional gleam of gold or silver in the case, with minimal text-only interpretation to accompany the isolated pieces of displayed treasure. One often has to travel elsewhere to localised visitor centre experiences, for instance the National Trust-managed Sutton Hoo site in Suffolk (also see Walsh and Williams 2019), for more colourful reconstructive displays of the brightly garbed characters and lavish burial chambers, where red garments and drapings stand-out strikingly amongst the surrounding imagery and models. As with the reconstructed West Stow Anglo-Saxon village, where mannequins don a representative range of the colours for beads and fabrics of the period, the floor-length backdrops and interpretation panels also emerge from the background in – perhaps not coincidentally – the same deep reds found on the garnets which characterise the period (Figure 3). Little is different in the actual content of both types of display, but the interpretation and utilisation of colour choice in how it is presented makes all the difference in how the audience and visitors are able to immerse themselves and picture a world which extends beyond the occasional piece of gold on show.

This of course is not to suggest that effective displays necessarily require supplemental artwork or colour schemes to enhance the exhibits themselves. As seen in the British Library’s recent ‘once- in-a-generation’ exhibition on ‘Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War’, which ran from the end of 2018 into early 2019 and featured some of the most extraordinary pieces of their time, including the Lindisfarne Gospels and finds from both Sutton Hoo and the Staffordshire Hoard, light and dark contrast are a powerful curatorial device. Spread over several rooms, this spectacular exhibit immerses one in darkness upon entry, with all illumination on the brilliant display of colours on the manuscript pages and other items of the cases, literally ‘lighting up’ our notion of the ‘Dark Ages’ through its focus on the exquisite skills of the Anglo-Saxons who created them (see Campbell-Johnston 2018). Though there is argument for conservation considerations in the lighting, echoes of the manipulation and careful limitation of light in the early – particularly Irish – churches can be felt, as one transitions from the brightly-lit gift shop to the ‘otherworldly’ space within, and slowly moves in procession from one focal point bathed in light to the next. The prohibition of photography – completely practical, though also suggestively re-emphasising the sacred nature of the content – is validated by the exhibition book (Breay and Story 2018) on-sale in the foyer, although the fact that modern reproductions fail to replicate the more sophisticated features (e.g. texture and saturation) of certain colours in publications (Pulliam 2013: 55) makes the visit in person all the more essential.

Despite difficulties in replication through modern technology, more recent trends make greater use of digital reconstructions of original colour schemes, such as the Historic Environment Scotland’s latest interpretation panels on the Pictish carved stones which made particular headlines with BBC Scotland

Highlands and Islands (see McKenzie 2017; also see Lang 2016 for the 3D imagery of the Gosforth Cross Project). These are illustrated with the left-hand side's decoration vividly represented in the bright green, reds, yellows, oranges, pinks, browns and white now expected for the palette available in this period, leaving the right side bare sandstone. The influence for this work likely derived from the National Museums Scotland's 2008 Glenmorangie Research Project, in which selective pieces of early medieval sculpture – amongst other treasured items – were investigated in order to create experimental reconstructions of their original appearance, particularly the added effect of coloured glass for eyes (Blackwell 2012). Both illustrate the different ways in which the sculpture could be brought to life, and do so in a presentative manner which allows both the vibrant originals and the worn thousand-year-old surfaces to be compared side-by-side.

One of the more imaginative exhibits on colour and its role in society is the recent 'Viking paint chart' at the National Museum of Denmark (Figure 4), reproduced as a result of chemical research on pigments represented in the archaeology at the royal hall of Sagnlandet Lejre (see Westen 2018). In addition to the exhibit's relatable and original presentation of the shades and hues in question through 'paint swatches', it stands out for its focus on colour perception, symbolism and composition (both pigments and binding agents), an extra level of depth often lacking in average presentations and exhibits of the period. Although no guidance is provided on what colours might be considered realistic choices, recent projects such as *The Viking Colouring Book* (Knight 2017) focus on offering accurately representative drawings, whilst empowering individuals to colour-in as they see fit and broaden the palette range. This potential to stray from the dulcet tones usually seen in artistic reconstructions and display guides at heritage sites, for example, the English Heritage-managed Tintagel Castle (see 'Colour in the curriculum' section below), certainly allows creative expression to flourish, and may also be an important step in opening minds towards more perceivably radical interpretations which may arise.

Unlike the material culture of the Early Middle Ages vivid floor to ceiling reconstructive paintings of Roman structures have been known for some time, even if some, such as the Commanding Officer's house at Arbeia, South Shields, received mixed reviews in their early days for 'dumbing-down' to ease understanding for visitors who confuse the conjectural nature of such works with actual reflections (Mueller-Zaugg 2012: 36–38). Today the increased concern with heritage tourism has relieved some of this thinking. Thus, brightly coloured domestic scenes now figure commonly in reconstruction projects, though still notably they appear more often in Roman structures than for other periods. This point is demonstrated at the multi-period experimental archaeology site at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire (Figure 5b–e), where the brilliantly painted villa interior dominates amongst the prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon houses either side. Many local museums are also only too happy to receive engaging reconstructions, including those built out of LEGO bricks (see Carter 2017 for the South Shields west gate model). By their very nature, LEGO is an obviously colourful way to create historic prototypes, yet despite today's extensive range of historic sets, including the 'Vikings' and 'Castle' lines, models of early medieval (non-Viking) scenes are left to be designed piece-meal from other sources, often requiring the commission of devoted specialists; even then, the current Vikings range contains one dragon, sea serpent or other fantastical creature for every two or three warriors, and the capacity for using them in historic reconstructions is limited. It would seem fair to suggest then that, despite increased recognition and considerations of colour impact in museum and other heritage displays – in some cases significantly – more work could still be made.

Colour in the curriculum

Some of the perception of colour – or lack of – in the 'Dark Ages' can come from simple illustrations in literature, even starting early in the curriculum learning for primary schools, particularly Key Stage 2 (aged 7 to 11). It must be stated that more recent books, published in the last 10 or so years, have done a surprisingly impressive job of depicting the various historical periods beyond their stereotypical



Figure 5: (a) Local re-enactment group Herigeas Hundas at the Saxon house at Butser Ancient Farm, Hampshire (Photo by Ross Underwood), demonstrating a range of colours in their attire, although the general colour palette of the Anglo-Saxon (b) and Iron Age (c) domestic scenes contrasts sharply with the brightly painted rooms (d,e) from the adjacent reconstructed Roman villa (Photos by Rachel Bingham)



Figure 6: Reconstruction drawing of 'Dark Age' Tintagel, Cornwall c. AD 700 (Copyright English Heritage, drawing by Bob Marshall)

rendering of an age where warfare was the main order of the day, with a relatively balanced account including domestic, industrial and religious life. However, there is a noticeable difference in the illustrations themselves, particularly the contrast between the Roman period and those thereafter. Even in more recent information books which are overall engaging in the highly colourful pages, for instance the *Kingfisher Readers* series (Steele 2013), Scandinavians are depicted with colours largely confined to the brightness – and often contrasting colour – of clothing (e.g. a red cloak and green top, possibly holding a wooden shield painted blue). Colour is limited in domestic décor, furnishings and tableware (with the exception of painted shields), leaving individual non-cultural or period-specific items (such as fruit on the table) and features of nature (tufts of green grass, the red and orange flames of a funeral pyre, or the blueness of the sea) to make-up the necessary palette range which best appeals to children's visual interest needs.

Even longer series packed with more in-depth details (e.g. *Curriculum Visions Explorers* or *Ladybird Histories*) follow this trend, with colour only really creeping into the artificial world of the Roman period, and reverting to more natural hues thereafter. Acknowledgement is made of what the original look to important buildings in the landscape would have been in the early medieval period, such as Anglo-Saxon churches and their brightly painted décor (Knapp 2014a: 27), but the overall colourfulness of the scenes are notably more plain than either their Roman or Viking counterparts. It is true that temple and villa scenes are an easy way to add a dash of white or red with their plaster, roof tiles and mosaic tegulae, making the Roman scenes less of a challenge for the illustrator who wants to ensure a pleasing effect. Yet, although Viking works rarely show much brightness on the structures themselves (instead limited to clothing, shields, etc), there is a notably more colourful look than the Anglo-Saxon scenes when contrasted side-by-side (Knapp 2014b), with the latter often quite dark in depictions and set in gloomy, stormy scenes.

Whether aimed at school children or more academic adult-oriented contexts, reconstruction art is never easy, particularly for the artist tasked with visualising scenes as though they were standing before them and drawing from such varied evidence – textual, environmental or other archaeological sources – inevitably exposing every detail to potential criticism. Individual artists naturally impose their own personalities, interests and backgrounds on the detail and style of their art (see Dobie 2019), and the context of the scene itself, e.g. a battlefield or funeral scene, certainly would hold some weight in how bright or dull a reconstruction might be. Yet even some reconstructions of English Heritage/Historic England calibre might be argued to employ a purposely subtle – rather than bright – palette, as for example the superbly detailed illustrations of Tintagel produced for the 2015 exhibition (Figure 6; Marshall 2015), in which even the famously blue seas of Cornwall are dulled and overcast.

With the Roman withdrawal and Anglo-Saxon settlement now a key feature of the National Curriculum (Department of Education 2013), understanding amongst the younger generation is clearly a new priority in heritage depictions of the era. Yet, it would not come as a surprise that the average primary school child dressed-up in Saxon garb comes in the same off-cut of fur or plain brown dress that is recycled for workshops from the Stone Age to Stuart period. A quick Google search for ‘Saxon costumes’ does little to suggest differently or offer more inspiring ideas, and even those families who might refer for ideas to the CBBC television adaptation of the popular *Horrible Histories* series, first aired in 2009, would find a similarly lacklustre costume range (with the earthy hues of the Saxons standing out especially when scenes are shot alongside blue-clad Viking warriors). At the same time, a reasonable number of Saxon re-enactor groups will, at the least, have their female participants in dresses of – albeit rarely vivid – blues, reds and other hues (Figure 5a), suggesting that further strides could be made in gradually altering popular perceptions and educating parents (and costume companies) in appropriate historic wear.

Visualising the Early Middle Ages on screen

Though the individual filming and cinematic techniques play a large role in the visualisation and colours on screen, it could be argued that this trend for subdued hues carries on in the films and television series for the early post-Roman period. The most memorable splash of colour in the 2004 *King Arthur* film is the woad painted onto Keira Knightley’s upper frame, and though Guy Ritchie’s recent Arthurian attempt *Legend of the Sword* applies his established modern take heavily, the notably insipid lighting effects do little to draw away from this common perception of a colourless era. *The Last Legion* (2007) and *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005) are likewise assorted shades of grey and brown, leaving the possible exception amongst the Dark Age film canon the 2006 *Tristan and Isolde*, which allows comparatively ornate garment – whether golden embroidery or textiles and silks of varied colours – no doubt due in part to the epic romance’s theme and desire to optimally beautify both the set and female lead.

Although Vikings on the large screen do not altogether fair much differently (e.g. *Pathfinder* (2007), *Viking* (2016), even *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010)), the History Channel's original series *Vikings*, which premiered in 2013, attempts a more realistic approach to its costumes – if not always in specific fashions or fabrics – through its purposefully bright dyed material (for more on the historical and archaeological themes of the series, see Pollard 2015; Williams 2019). Subtle hues are replaced in favour of bright indigos, pinks and maroons, with detailed accounts for every costume choice – down to the berries, woad and other natural dyes reflected in both archaeology and the literature – carefully selected by the costume designer, Joan Bergin, in an attempt to deviate from their savage image cliché (Snead 2013). More than one online critic will cite the under-representation of helmets, shaven heads and tattoos in the show amongst other supposed fact-checked inaccuracies (e.g. Hammond 2016, although it must be stated that this is not considered an entirely credible review), and the bright colours are no exception; in the case of the latter, however, it may be another reflection of public misconception and expectation for the more nuanced shades rather than properly investigated misgivings.

It is certain that being a creation of the history-based network played a role in what has generally been perceived as a more researched approach to the palette available in *Vikings*, as well as an indefinite airtime which could draw-out and expand upon social aspects – including hair and clothing – that the mainly battle-themed feature films could not. When compared to its Late Anglo-Saxon counterpart, BBC's *The Last Kingdom*, however, the Viking culture once again receives credit for a brighter colour scheme, a symbolic differentiation between the two cultures who – though admittedly dressed similarly in real life – had the 'austere...grey colour palette' of the Saxons contrasted intentionally with the Vikings' mustards, burnt oranges and sea blues (Carnival Films 2016). Similarly, when looking further back, the newly aired (2018) *Britannia* is a contrastingly bright visualisation of the Roman invasion, one which incidentally uses colour purposefully for the native tribes – as with the bright blue of the Regni – rather than the Romans themselves. Is this trend due to the more generous network budget of Sky Atlantic and artistic choice, or yet another reflected depiction of the dulling of the Early Middle Ages which succeeded it? There is, of course, no such thing as an entirely historically accurate drama, and certain artistic liberties will always be taken, but perhaps more productions set in the early medieval era could be as free with their vivacious hues as other periods – including the later medieval – either side.

Conclusions

Although this chapter has been a perceivably piecemeal overview of evidence for colour perception from Roman Britain to the later medieval era, when considered as a whole, there is strong argument for suggesting that we ignore too readily the colour systems and palette range of brilliant and radiant tones available for the early medieval period. As seen in the overwhelming allure of, for instance, purpura, gold and silver, iridescence and material which particularly caught the light was an especial appeal of early medieval society, as much as the brightness of particular hues, and it was these qualities which particularly gained value and made the items such significant commodities. Certain colours – such as red – stand out for their overwhelming preference in use, but their appeal goes much deeper to include symbolic, economic and wider cross-cultural influences. The same can be said for the overwhelming light and dark contrasts which are mirrored in not only the literature, but in the artwork, particularly the painted sculpture and wall murals which adorned the churches and helped reinforce various zones within.

It is important therefore that the objects and structures showcased in museums and exhibition spaces are not regarded in isolation in order to generalise for the overall aesthetic package; just as a garnet brooch on its own does little to inform on colour preference for its period, we must make the most of all the evidence combined – from the gleaming white of the plastered church walls to the ecclesiastical robes and golden liturgical vessels or embroidered tapestries set aglow by the artificial lighting – to gain a full

sense of the visual effect and the experiences that would have ensued. This is where exhibitions must go beyond a basic artefact display and delve into imaginative reproductions or other interpretation which help an audience appreciate wider landscapes and context, including the full chromatic range. Whether overt use of red panels and other fittings, as at Sutton Hoo, are the right approach in emphasising the prominence of this particular colour in the Saxon period, or whether lighting effects which highlight the objects and allow their lustre and brilliant hues to speak for themselves are the answer, each site and artefact is unique and must be allowed to tell its story in its own way. Some of the examples cited however, including the Viking paint swatches of Denmark's National Museum, are a commendable step in the right direction, though more of the UK heritage sites and centres which 'play it safe' in their interpretation could be more experimental with their sensory engagement, and contribute to dispelling the popular notions of darkness which surround the period.

Information books and other media used in curriculum learning have generally made strides in recent years to present heritage with a fresher and brighter look, but this is presumably as much about offering stimulating and appealing imagery for children as it is about genuine attempts to represent colour schemes accurately. Of all the media considered, the basic images in children's literature are amongst the most effortless to change and would receive the least criticism. After all, the colour stimuli of a bright red exhibition space can also potentially provoke aggravating mental imagery (e.g. hunger, anger, and more), but the added splash of red, blue, green, yellow, etc. to an otherwise grey-brown scene lends much to the overall effect and costs little in return. With the ability for larger research-funded projects to employ 3D scanning and other reconstructive techniques to produce innovative educational tools (e.g. Gosforth), perhaps there is additional call for increased funds towards updating – and colouring – the information series, teaching packs and online resources available to schools.

As with the simple addition of colour to illustrations of early medieval culture, the fact that re-enactor groups are able to don relatively colourful tunics makes the common lack of bright hues in film and television adaptations even more questionable. There is a long-established dichotomy between popular culture and historical authenticity, and most historic fiction films – perhaps justifiably – could be argued to focus less on factual accuracy and rather in making the past familiar to otherwise disconnected audiences (Hall 2004: 160). However, given that factors such as commercial return or production costs are less likely to dictate details in costume choice, there is no reason that more series and films cannot mimic the approach taken in works like *Vikings* and attempt replications of colours as represented in the archaeological evidence; indeed, as with artistic reconstructions, such a move would go a long way in educating the masses, and gradually chip away at 'Dark Age' notions which are still prevalent.

It is no coincidence that few colour-themed exhibitions focus on the hiatus between the late Roman period and coming of the Vikings, and many illustrative and cinematic attempts equally cast a comparatively bleak and visually darkened picture on the era. This may be intentionally emblematic – the violent destruction and divided land set to waste after the withdrawal of the Roman troops, etc – or partially due to the lack of concrete knowledge on a 'Dark Age' which was traditionally defined from its dearth of historical sources. This chapter has striven to raise awareness of the interpretive problems surrounding the early medieval period and its representation of colour and light in public archaeology, and calls for a heightened need to bring the epoch out of its shadows and caution in its regularly darkened expressions, whether in museum and heritage displays, educational resources or adaptations on screen.

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Why do Horned Helmets still Matter?

Sacha O'Connor

Although there is no conclusive evidence for horned helmets within the archaeological record for the Viking period, modern society remains fascinated with them as a Viking icon, deploying them in sports, souvenirs and in music among many other media. This chapter examines the results of a brief survey about the 'horned helmet' phenomena. It questions whether the archaeological community has focused too negatively on the subject, and whether horned helmets can be used positively instead to foster interest in the Viking world.

Introduction

Horned helmets are possibly one of the most iconic symbols of the Viking Age. Despite the widespread popular belief that these objects existed in the early medieval past, there is still no archaeological evidence for their existence, although earlier examples of 'horned helmets' are known from late Bronze Age Denmark (Vandkilde 2013: 167). The invention of the 'Viking horned helmet' can be traced back to a production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Frölich's illustrations from the 1870s, with romanticised artistic depictions becoming common at the beginning of the 20th century (Cederlund 2011: 11; Dale 2014; Djupdræt 2016; Frank 2000). Horned helmets have become a symbol for sports teams, both American and European football, fantasy and children's films (e.g. *How to Train your Dragon*) and video games such as *Skyrim*. They are sometimes linked with a sense of playful engagement with the past (Figure 1), but they are also connected to portrayals of a Norse hyper-masculine, violent and androcentric society (see Dale 2019). This icon is persistent despite many 'serious' attempts to represent the Viking period which eschew their use, as with the History Channel television show *Vikings*. Indeed, in Iceland, the horned helmet has become a symbol of national identity and a way of commodifying Viking origin myths. For example, in the Viking World museum close to Keflavik Airport, Reykjavik, horned helmets are sold as gifts alongside other archaeological reconstructions.¹ Fans from Iceland's



Figure 1: Horned helmets on heads and floats at the Fremont Solstice Parade, Fremont, Seattle, Washington, 21 June 2014 (Photograph by Joe Mabel, 2014, Wikimedia Commons)

local football teams wear horned helmets to the games in what may seem like an intimidation tactic: the helmet represents power, violence and pride to the Icelandic people. This is a broader threat because Icelandic people, who originally descend from the Vikings, are reinforcing a harmful stereotype about their own ancestors. Yet across northern Europe and beyond, horned helmets are everywhere evoking a complex nested sense of 'Viking-ness', both within and beyond those peoples that see themselves as either descendants or opponents to the historic Norse raiders, traders and settlers of the late 8th to mid-11th centuries AD (Cederlund 2011; Ward 2000).

¹ <https://www.vikingworld.is/#home>

The challenge of horned helmets

This situation presents archaeologists with a two-fold challenge. First, the most popular icon of the Vikings is a falsehood generated in the 19th century: archaeologists have repeatedly felt the need to counter this misleading symbol and its attendant clichéd associations and stereotypes about the Vikings, and thus afford due respect to past people who cannot speak for themselves and were far more than marauding ‘savages’ (Henson 2011: 224). Second, the horned helmet myth, used positively as an educational tool to engage, could then support archaeology in remaining relatable to the public and tackling misconceptions through measured engagement and reflection. The main problem for archaeologists when challenging any famous inauthentic objects is that the public could find this alienating and thus feel excluded or estranged from the conversation (Holtorf 2007: 134; see Williams 2016). The horned helmet could be positively engaged with rather than dismissed, since for over two centuries it has become an important dimension of the Viking era’s modern perception (Cederroth 2011; see also Dale 2019). Indeed, they can be positively deployed in museum displays, as at the Manx Museum, where a replica horned helmet dating from the 1960s and ’70s illustrates the popularity of re-enactment and the celebration of Viking heritage on the island (Williams 2016) (Figure 2).

The challenges are exemplified in the modern world by the Internet which allows people to tap into a vast amount of data of varying reliability (Aigner 2016: 181). This is particularly relevant to the Early Middle Ages which is populated by narratives focusing on warfare and treasure. In this context, horned



Figure 2: 1960s horned helmet on display at the Manx Museum (Photograph: Howard Williams, with permission of the Manx Museum)



Figure 3: Horned helmeted member of the public watches Viking-period re-enactors at the Heysham Viking Festival, 20 July 2019 (Photograph: Howard Williams)

helmets remain a defining feature of popular perception through digital images: a simple search in Google images for the word 'Viking' brings up a variety of horned helmets, both reconstructions, examples from other time periods, as well as fantasy headgear linked to myths or sagas.

Certainly popular periods of history inspire both recreations and fakery in the face of popular demand (Lovata 2011: 195). Indeed, Eagleton remarks 'human existence is at least as much about fantasies and desires as it is about truth and reason', this can be seen in contemporary society (Hall 2009: 492). Imagined realities, brought on by video games and films become tenacious and difficult to detach from actual reality, this is especially the case for horned helmets because of their deep roots in the media and the Internet (Hall 2009: 497). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the public demand extravagant 'reconstructions' supplied commercially online over the unadorned archaeological reconstructions often presented at

re-enactments. Inauthentic material culture not only presents the problem of it not existing within the archaeological record, but it can convey a meaning or an inaccurate presentation of the society it represents; this is the communicative medium all objects hold (Tilley 1989: 189). This is particularly harmful to a period not so long ago described as 'The Dark Ages', where objects must communicate disproportionately more to compensate for the small amount of written evidence (Jesch 2015: 12). Horned helmets are perhaps most problematic when deployed within heritage contexts, although even here they can be considered playful and can be juxtaposed, rather than counter, more historically grounded and educational dimensions (Figure 3). Their valorisation in public art to evoke the Viking past is perhaps most misleading, in part because they are the most enduring (Figure 4).

Uses and potential of the horned helmet phenomena

Roberta Frank concludes her 2000 chapter exploring the 19th-century invention of the Vikings by reflecting 'However 'wrong', the horned Viking helmet has been a recurrent fantasy transmuting the desert of daily existence into contours rare and strange.' (Frank 2000: 208). Can the 'rare and strange' character of horned helmets be more than simply misleading or harmful? Instead, given their ubiquity, can horned helmets be used to archaeological advantage, educating people and enhancing the popularity and increased interest in the Early Middle Ages? The importance of inauthentic objects as educational tools has been noted as effective stimulators for arousing interest in certain themes (Spring 2015: 213). Their place within popular culture offers archaeologists an avenue of communication with the broader



Figure 4: Statue dating from the 1960s, showing two ‘Vikings’ with shields but without bladed weapons and incredibly prominent horned helmets, situated outside the Viking Centre shopping complex, Jarrow, County Durham (Photograph: C.J. Hyslop)

public (Lovata 2007: 18). Video games might provide a useful case study, not only because they offer an immersive experience for gamers, but also because they have fostered enthusiastic cosplay (Figure 5). While often neglected as a source for education, recently the revenue from the video game industry has overtaken Hollywood, with historical titles becoming some of the most popular (Gardner 2007: 257; Reinhard 2018). In 2003, a movement called ‘serious games’ was developed which incorporated the use of video games into education and teacher training (Annetta 2008: 229). Developers of these games have started to consult historians and archaeologists when attempting to recreate life-like environments for



Figure 5: Skyrim cosplay at the Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo, 2015. (Photograph: GabboT, Wikimedia Commons)

immerse gamers. In doing this they are starting to be regarded as sources for learning and communication, especially for archaeology (Gardner 2007: 257). This rise in demand for games has been noted as a possible educational tool, it will allow younger generations to become captivated by material that they can participate in on their own time (Annetta 2008: 230). Due to this wide use of video games globally, the possibilities for archaeological learning are great if managed correctly (Meyers Emery and Reinhard 2016: 144).

It is true that horned helmets have been misused in games such as *Skyrim*, where Viking mythology, life and warfare could make the player assume a connection between the horned helmet and the Viking Age. However, its sales (30 million, accurate in 2016 before re-release) proves archaeologists now have a unique platform to communicate to a huge audience through a media outlet that gets vast attention from people of all ages, all nationalities and beliefs (Howard 2016). The widely popular horned helmet can be incorporated into the entertainment aspect of gaming whilst also presenting important aspects of Viking life,

such as social interaction, giving the user a feeling of 'lived space' in historical environments (Woolford and Dunn 2013: 4). Developers have the potential to create virtual realities in which the Vikings are more likely to have lived and then satisfy public expectation by giving the gamer the option to go on raiding missions. This is both educating and entertaining for the player.

Conclusion

The media have been content to perpetuate horned helmets as a commonly held stereotype associated with brutality, strength and male triumph. Despite the global abuse of the horned helmet, I have identified its potential use in the video game industry, operating as a gateway to reach the general public, especially young people, in order to better educate them about actual Viking life as opposed to the violent, warring stereotype. Integrating a gateway for public engagement with archaeology within video games would allow iconic artefacts, such as horned helmets, to operate as a stimulus to new audiences, breaking down stereotypes without alienating users, while engaging them.

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Public Archaeology of Early Medieval Assembly Places and Practices: Þingvellir

Matthew Kelly

In contemporary society the 'Dark Ages' are often depicted as a period of political instability throughout Europe following the withdrawal of the Roman Empire. Focusing on Þingvellir, this chapter will explore how public engagement in archaeological research on assembly places and practices might modify public misconceptions of the Early Middle Ages and counter its use by extremist groups.

Introduction

The 'Dark Ages' are often characterised in popular culture as a time of barbarian marauders causing instability and operating in a lawless society, yet equally the origins of the northern nations have long considered manifest in early medieval assembly places and practices, considered as possessing the roots of laws, customs and democratic principles (Byock 1992; Sanmark 2017). This perception is exemplified by Iceland's national assembly: the *althing* (*alþingi*) at Þingvellir. Since the early 10th century (traditionally it has thought to have been founded in AD 930), it has long been regarded as the political and symbolic heart of Iceland. For two weeks in every June from the founding until 1798, the *alþingi* gathered here for a range of judicial and administrative matters (Mehler 2015). Sources suggest several thousand people may have been in attendance at some of the meetings (Byock 2001; 2002; Grønlie 2006). How is the landscape and its history and archaeology central to its political and cultural significance today, and how can archaeologists address any challenges that arise in its popular perceptions and narratives?



Figure 1: View of Þingvellir, Iceland, from the south (Photograph: Christopher Michel, 2011, Wikimedia Commons)

Þingvellir (Figure 1) has long been portrayed in references in saga literature (Smith 1995) as an integral part of a story of the national origins of Iceland and its and later Christian conversion in the 10th and 11th centuries. This importance persisted through periods of Norwegian (1262–1662) and Danish (1662–1944) rule, the site being used for annual meetings until 1798 (Graham-Campbell 2001). It later became the focus of the Icelandic independence movement, invigorated by 25 popular meetings held at Þingvellir from 1848 to 1907 (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 124). Created a national park in 1930, it was at Þingvellir that independence from Denmark was celebrated in 1944. Subsequently, a range of anniversary gatherings that sought to portray a unified and nostalgic past took place at the site through the later 20th and early 21st centuries (e.g. Hálfðanarsson 2000). Þingvellir's international significance was acknowledged by its designation as a UNESCO world heritage site (site 1152) in 2004.¹

Today, it is a place integrated into the heritage mass tourism for non-Icelandic visitors and, through its links to proto-democratic practices and its portrayal as a geological 'meeting place between America and Europe' given its situation in the rift valley where the Continental plates divide, it is perceived and narrated in terms of the values of 'global civic society' (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 120). Meanwhile, for Icelanders themselves, it is a focus of national pride as a place of memory – spiritual and historical – coalescing shared identities and history and differentiating them from non-Icelanders by linking them to the 'Golden Age' before Norwegian and Danish control (Hálfðanarsson 2000). Moreover, for individual Icelanders, it is a popular place of personal narratives and memories linked to excursions and recreation (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 119).



Figure 2: View of the law rock as an aerial panorama (Photograph: Bob T, 2017, Wikimedia Commons)

A topography of memory: rock, sagas and archaeology

The distinctive and memorable natural topography of Þingvellir has been particularly significant in its role as a place of memory: its cliffs provoking a powerful spiritual connection to the landscape as well as serving as a natural sonic amplifier (Bell 2010) while the law rock (Lögborg) provides a natural monument as the focus (see Brink 2004: 207) (Figures 2 and 3). The Öxará river demarcated it also: a dimension of water boundaries shared with assembly places in Scandinavia and the North Atlantic (Riisøy 2013; Sanmark 2017) (Figure 2). This iconic significance has been enhanced by the relative

¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1152>

lack of other historic monuments compared with Scandinavia (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 124), and its historical significance has been melded to this sense of unique natural beauty to define a mythical sacrality to the place (Hálfðanarsson 2000; Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 127). In contrast, human-made mounds seem commonplace foci for þing sites in Scandinavia (Brink 2004; Sanmark 2017).

Yet the sacred character of this natural place is only one dimension. The popular 20th- and 21st-century perception of Þingvellir is heavily influenced by *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók*, both written by Ari Thorgilsson (1067–1148), and 13th-century saga literature (Jóhannesson 2014). Together with its mention in various family sagas (e.g. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960: 163–165, 242–256), these sources have conjured misconceptions that have fostered Þingvellir as a symbol of independence and nationalism rooted in the Viking past (Byock 1992; Hálfðanarsson 2000). Archaeological investigations and mapping have enhanced this narrative since the 1860s, helping to connect present-day people to this imagined, glorious past (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 125; Mehler 2015; Vésteinsson 2013). Archaeology has further helped to project Þingvellir's wider significance across the northern world as an archetypal site, thus inspiring a broader mythology regarding Viking-period law and order only relatively recently countered by more detailed research on the complex changes and fluctuating scale of assembly places and practices (e.g. Brink 2004; Sanmark 2017) as well as the recognition of many other assembly places across Iceland and the problematic nature of early saga-related research on them (Sanmark 2017: 17; Semple and Sanmark 2013).



Figure 3: View of the law rock and cliffs at Þingvellir, looking south (Photograph: Hansueli Krapf, 2006, Wikimedia Commons)

Yet archaeological research has also refined contemporary understandings of the use of the site that, in part, counter or refine the saga narratives. One aspect of the saga-inspired vision is that *Landnámabók* claims Þingvellir boasted the greatest market in Iceland (Byock 2002; as does Ólaf's *Saga Helga*: Stefánsdóttir and Malück 2014). However, the most current excavations at Þingvellir in 2009, found no supporting evidence for this (Arvakur 2016; Óskarsdóttir 2016; Vésteinsson 2013). Mehler (2015) suggests that alternative locations in Iceland would have hosted markets, such as the site at Gásir at which there is an abundance of objects that would be synonymous with a vast market (Mehler 2015; Roberts 2006). These excavations at Gásir were conducted from 2001 to 2006 and established the presence of storage pits, booths, faunal remains and other traces that would be typical of a market site (Franchetti 2014; Roberts 2006). In addition, the site dates from 12th to the 14th century and is mentioned in the sagas. Mehler (2015) also argues that there was a coastal market located at Maríhöfn; which is again mentioned in the sagas but excavations have yet to be conducted at the time of writing. Roberts (2006) states that Þingvellir lacks the diversity of artefacts which would suggest its function as a trading point. At present, therefore, archaeological investigations are challenging the traditional perception of Þingvellir previously used to fit a nationalist model wishing to cast it as a grand parliamentary and market site akin to Sweden's Gamla Uppsala (Mehler 2015).

A further way in which the sagas and archaeology have together influenced a nationalist reading of Þingvellir is through their focus on wealthy and prestigious individuals and families of the settlement and Commonwealth periods attending the alþingi at Þingvellir (Grønle 2006). This makes it tempting to regard the earlier generations of settlers as purely Norse: a vision of culture-historical migrations which parallels the early 20th-century 'settlement archaeology' of Gustaf Kossinna (Arnold 1990; Jones 1997). The rest of the population and its likely complex genetic and cultural composition are written out of the story in this manner. The sacrality of Þingvellir and its links to ancestors and nation via the saga literature resides not only on the place's assembly function, but through the adjacent church which has come to serve as a burial site of some of Iceland's most famous poets and other leading figures in Icelandic history (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 118). The Prime Minister still has a summer residence at Þingvellir, adjacent to the church. Moreover, the Þingvellir is also the focal point of ceremonies by Iceland's fastest growing religious group: Ásatru (BBC 2015).

Icelandic National Front

As with many early medieval symbols (see Sturtevant 2017)² and heritage sites across Scandinavia which attract far-right groups, Þingvellir has been co-opted via the Internet. Alongside its integration into a globalised neoliberal world of mass tourism and its pivotal role in nationalist ideology, Þingvellir has equally become perceived as an icon for extremist political groups both in Iceland and also for those elsewhere in the Global West who wish to celebrate a pagan 'Viking' homogeneous culture. As such, the monument has continued to be mobilised to evoke more than Icelandic nationalist ideology, but also white supremacist ideologies linked to the Vikings. Strong similarities between Norwegian and Icelandic nationalism hinge on the far-right (Bergmann 2016) and the Icelandic National Front, founded in 2016, receives c. 1.7% of the popular vote (Halfsted 2016). The social media campaign on Facebook which started in 2016 has over one thousand followers, a figure that represents 0.4% of the entire Icelandic population (Halfsted 2016). Although this may seem like an insignificant figure however when compared to a group with similar political aspirations in Britain, the Britain First Facebook page, founded in 2011, now has approximately 3% of the British population as followers. Therefore, it can be conjectured that the Icelandic National Front, if it grew at a similar rate would also reach figures of this level (approximately 0.2% compared to 0.42% growth per annum). Studying the Icelandic National Front Facebook page shows that there is a regular use of saga passages, coupled with many photos of Þingvellir. These in turn are connected to their hard-line political discourse on migration, ethnicity

² <https://www.adl.org/hatesymbolsdatabase>

and nationhood, drawing upon a long tradition of nationalistic narratives inherited from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Bergmann 2016).

It can be argued that, in addition to its popular mainstream appeal, Þingvellir is thus implicated in this ideology of cultural ‘purity’ and national origins for those desiring a state with no immigration or minorities (Bergmann 2016; Halfsted 2016). The focal point of the Viking settlement in Iceland, Þingvellir is therefore a place of contestation as well as national consensus (Hálfðanarsson 2000), linked to wider digital movements celebrating white ‘Viking’ origins across Scandinavia and beyond (for context, see Richardson and Booth 2017; Niklasson, E. and H. Hølleland 2018).

Conclusion

Enshrined by its UNESCO World Heritage Site status, Þingvellir is conceptualised as both a natural wonder and national birthplace: a ‘perfect national symbol’ (Hálfðanarsson 2000: 23), but also a powerful international symbol of the Viking Age and ‘northern’ proto-democracies straddling the New and Old worlds. This narrative has been fostered by the sagas but also archaeological investigations, influencing and sustaining engagements with the landscape of Þingvellir for Icelanders and visitors alike (Loftsdóttir and Lund 2016: 131–135). These readings and visualisations continue to portray Þingvellir as a ‘universal’ place, but as such it has come to serve both Icelandic nationalist and global white supremacist ends. In this context, the challenge will be for archaeologists working on Europe’s early medieval assembly places and practices to navigate this fraught political terrain and robustly qualify and problematize romantic notions of an idealised vision of national origins in a noble proto-democratic Viking-period assembly places and practices. Much will depend on how archaeologists communicate their messages via both traditional and digital media in coming years, both regarding Þingvellir, but also at other places of assembly across northern Europe, from Sweden to Scotland.

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Dressing for Ragnarök?

Commodifying, Appropriating and Fetishising the Vikings

Madeline Walsh

The word 'Viking' instantly conjures an image of a muscular warrior, a larger-than-life, usually male, though increasingly female, noble barbarian. This image is highly marketable, allowing for the appropriation, commodification, and fetishisation of the Vikings through mass media, public events and even through archaeological research. The popular image or interpretation of early medieval people is partial, problematic, and misleading, it persists in popular culture. This is not only because it has been ingrained and manipulated in the public's consciousness for generations. In addition, the Vikings appeal to ideas of adventure and nostalgia for pre-modern cultures. This chapter suggests that although these images are problematic and need to be challenged, they can still be beneficial to the overall study of early medieval societies. I argue that both 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' popular portrayals of late first millennium AD Scandinavians foster people's interest in how to study the past in both a fun and educational way.

The Viking's image within contemporary popular culture appears to have an enduring appeal for academics and non-academics alike. From the success of multiple television shows, movies, and commodities in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the interest in Vikings has never been higher or more public (Young and Haley 2012: 272). The Vikings are able to reach a wider audience than ever before due to the success of mass media in the recent decades, the rise of the Internet making more information readily available, and of many key archaeological discoveries in the twentieth century (Ashby 2014; Service 1998: 27). However, the Vikings have fallen prey to being appropriated, commodified and almost fetishised, both in a sexual context and as a point of fascination by businesses to sell to the public for profit with the surge popularity in recent decades and accessibility of mass media (Appadurai 1986: 16; Baram and Rowan 2004: 9; Nicholas and Wylie 2012: 14; Service 1998: 3; Ward 2001: 5). This in turn has presented a skewed, idealised image of the Vikings to the public that has evolved over time, but retains many traits redolent of a Victorian concept of the noble, yet wild northern barbarian to the general public that academics have tried to dispel. Marketing products have benefitted through association with the Vikings, evoking a sense of nostalgia for pre-modern life, but specifically the qualities of strength and endurance, adventurousness and exploration, and jovial feasting (Ashby 2014; Dale 2019; Wawn 2000: 10).

From the Victorian period to present day, the Viking culture and people have been appropriated, commodified and fetishised in popular culture (Clark 2007: 135; Young and Haley 2012: 268–272; Wilkins 2018: 3). It is common to think of extremist groups using runes, notably *sowilo* and *tiwaz*, along with appropriating other common Viking symbols and art motifs to promote their own ideology, but appropriation and commodification of Vikings can be more mundane (Baram and Rowan 2004: 10–17; Root 1996: viii; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 12). Objects based on stereotypical Viking archaeological objects or symbols, such as *Mjölhnir* pendants or drinking horns are a common enough occurrence, and sold in many heritage stores or online, despite the wearer not necessarily knowing what the image means or how it has been appropriated through time (Coombe 1993: 255; Halewood and Hannam 2001: 567; Ward 2001: 3). Certainly, commodities based upon Viking-period material culture are a way in which the public can engage with the past on their own terms, but are also a tool in which one can manipulate the past to make it more digestible and sanitary to the public, lacking authenticity and due respect to the past societies in question and their descendant communities (Baram and Rowan 2004: 9; Halewood and Hannam 2001: 567–568; Holtorf 2007: 6; Holtorf 2005: 548; Sabatiuk 2015; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007).

This situation is far from new: it has a long history rooted in romantic nationalism. The appropriation and fetishisation of the Vikings was used in the 19th century as a way to promote ideologies on imperialism and promote an ideal, nostalgic past (Kobialka 2017: 219; Wawn 2000: 30). During this time, the tropes contemporary society now associates with Scandinavian peoples of the late first millennium AD, such as horned helmets, drinking horns, and the noble northern barbarian trope were solidified in the form of film, plays and operas (Ashby 2014; Wawn 2000: 8). This, in conjunction with notable archaeological discoveries and indeed the rediscovery and study of multiple rune-stones and literature throughout the 19th and 20th centuries has allowed the mythos one now associates with the Vikings to exist and indeed persist (Fell 1993: 92; Harty 2011b: 110; Wawn 2000: 8). However, despite generations of debunking and querying, it still remains common in the 21st century to see the Vikings presented as the ultimate ideal in masculinity, or indeed a female equivalent (Wilkins 2016; Trafford 2019). Additionally, tropes one commonly associates with early medieval peoples were further appropriated, fetishised and solidified in the public's consciousness in metal and rock music in the 20th century in their lyrics and artwork to aid in various bands' own cultivated imageries and as a way to express 'counter-culturalism' (Ashby and Schofield 2015: 494; Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 60). One need only listen to Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song* to conceptualise the redolent tropes the Victorian peoples created, the Vikings are stated as 'your overlords' whose 'only goal will be the western shore' in the lyrics. While Led Zeppelin's lyrics are slightly trivial and simplistic, the song remains popular, and is largely successful, due to its application of Viking tropes, i.e. sexually aggressive northern barbarians, making it easier to digest and understand by the general public than perhaps more obscure and subtle references in other Viking inspired song (Ashby and Schofield 2015: 496). Furthermore, a large swathe of characters in Viking-based books, films, television series and video games are portrayed as attractive and at their peak physical ability (Tveskov and Erlandson 2007; Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 60). For example, Marvel's *Thor* films and the *Vikings* television series might be criticised for fetishising the human body itself: the obtuse sexual themes seem to be primarily implemented for the benefit of the audience rather than inspired by engaging with the complex and nuanced appearances known from surviving material culture and written sources (Finke and Shichtman 2011: 160–162; Mudhar 2011; Wilkins 2016: 5).

Moreover, the Vikings in popular culture have frequently been recycled and refurbished over time in conjunction with research trends in early medieval archaeology (Ashby 2014; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015; Service 1998: 121–125; Wawn 2000: 84). For example, the 1970s and '80s saw a general emphasis in academic research for the discussion and portrayal of Vikings as farmers and tradespeople with the discovery of urban sites such as Birka, Ribe, and Hedeby (Ashby 2014; Wawn 2000: 372). This trend in academic research has persisted well into the 2010s, yet in mass media, the Vikings are celebrated *en masse* as northern barbarians, usually from the noble or ruling class (Clark 2007: 138; Downham 2012: 1; Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 57; Ward 2001: 11; Williams 2016). These past peoples are portrayed as ruthless and violent entrepreneurs and politicians, constantly struggling for power, which Ashby (2014) postulates is a reflection and commentary on contemporary society against a historical backdrop (Downham 2013: 2–3; Hempen 1991: 6; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 11). Certainly, the depictions on the early medieval period in the *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom* television series have helped coloured the view of this time as one that is rife with elitism and xenophobia from ethnically or culturally different societies that mirror more the mood and fears of present society than it depicts an accurate Viking age or early medieval society (Ashby 2014; Downham 2013; Fell 1993: 86; Service 1998: 123; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007). Early medieval peoples, predominantly from northern Europe and Britain, are depicted as divided through these aforementioned issues time and time again, but relatively little attention is paid to the rich ethnic and cultural subtleties within individual societies, or if such prejudice was actually rampant (Halewood and Hannam 2001; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007). Indeed the archaeological record can show that societies were mixed ethnically and socially at least on a mercantile level, if not on an actual socially and ethnically diverse, cross cultural level, based upon textual evidence and dress ornaments found during archaeological excavations throughout northern Europe (Ashby 2014; Downham 2012: 7–8).

This depiction of the Vikings people as northern barbarians invading other's lands is not always supported by available evidence, but popular uses of the Viking people need not always be viewed in a negative light (Harty 2011: 197; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 2; Service 1998: 121; Ward 2001: 4-6). Many Scandinavians see these portrayals of the Vikings positively, stating that seeing their ancestors celebrated and displayed in such a public and respectful way engenders a feeling of pride in their heritage (Halewood and Hannam 2007: 567; Ward 2001: 7). Coombe (1993: 251), also notes the benefits of popular uses of the Vikings, adding that the general public may have never learned about a large swathe of the past without archaeology and popular culture working together (Holtorf 2005: 549; Ward 2001: 25; Williams 2016). The appropriation and commodification of the Vikings in this way opens up the door for the public to engage with and learn from academics, making the subject of the Vikings more accessible to everyone (Holtorf 2005: 549-550; McPhaul 2016: 6; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007; Service 2014; Ward 2001; Williams 2016). The divergent concepts working together bridge the gap between academics and non-academics and should not be discouraged. As Williams (2016) and Ward (2001) state: simply because horned helmets are not demonstrably grounded in verified archaeological evidence does not mean they should be ruled out of Viking age narratives completely (Holtorf 2007: 144). Additionally, evidentially inaccurate elements in contemporary renditions of Norse myths, such as Marvel's *Thor* comics or Viking paraphernalia appropriated in American football games, can justify their place alongside actual Viking age archaeology in contemporary society. These elements are just another step in the Viking's timeline and need not be viewed as inherently misleading, but are part of a complex biography of perpetual revaluations of the Vikings in the past and in today's popular culture (Coombe 1993: 257; Mudhar 2011; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 13; Tvesko and Erlandson 2007; Ward 2001: 14).



Figure 1: Promotional photograph of three meads sold by the Lancashire Mead Company, each named after a Norse mythological character or trope (reproduced with permission of the Lancashire Mead Company)

It does not stop with contemporary material culture either, medieval objects are being brought back into modern society's consciousness, in particular mead, which *English Heritage* claim to sell 'a bottle every ten minutes' (English Heritage 2018). Mead has a high pedigree with regards to the drinking world, both ancient and modern, it requires time, patience, and skill to obtain the ingredients and to make the alcohol itself. Furthermore, it has historically been associated with the Norse gods, most often Odin and Bragi, but also commonly regarded as a drink to swear oaths to, and in terms of mead distributing, is a distinctly female performance, an important social role noted for both *Wealtheow* in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* and the valkyries in Norse literary sources (Finke and Shichtman 2011: 163; McPhaul 2016: 20–30). Moreover, due to the alcohol's sweet, taste and overall uniqueness in the market, it allows for much experimentation in both cocktails and experimental archaeology, making it a popular ingredient to use in many high end bars and Viking re-enactors (English Heritage 2018). For example, the Lancashire Mead Company (Figure 1) has combined Viking heritage allusions with mead in creating a range of drinks varying in taste and colour, many afforded the names of Norse gods and giants (for example, *Baldur*, *Freya* and *Loki*) (Lancashire Mead Company 2019). The Lancashire Mead Company thus strives to connect its traditional meads to the imaginative, mythological and poetic associations, more than the adventurous, hyper-masculine and feasting dimensions, of the Vikings in popular culture (cf. Halewood and Hannam 2001: 574–575). Furthermore the conjunction of Viking heritage and the popular culture has been similarly followed up with other drink companies such as Ragnarok Gin and the Jorvik Viking centre's Jorvik Gin which also use Viking age inspired herbs and flavours in conjunction with contemporary distilling methods (see also Dale 2019: 221–223).

Furthermore, presentations on the Viking people cannot always be perfectly accurate, as archaeological and heritage presentations are required to be concise, informative and entertaining to the general public, and cannot present every point of view. These presentations, by definition, must confine people or characters into tropes much the same way mass media does: to keep the audience entertained and enthralled (Harty 2011a: 3; Harty 2011b: 109; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007; Service, 2014; Ward 2001) and cannot always enmesh themselves in the minutiae of the Viking peoples' lives as much as academic papers or conferences may (Hannam and Halewood 2001: 566; Holtorf 2007). Back Danielsson (2017), examines the way in which pop-culture may influence the archaeology in the reconstruction of the Viking noble-woman Estrid in the Stockholm county museum (Back Danielsson 2017: 196). The woman is depicted as both a mother and a shield maiden, occasionally holding childrens' shoes or a sword in her hands without much evidence being able to support either claim (Back Danielsson 2017: 200–202). Further, the suggestion has been made that the body discovered near the rune-stone inscribed with the name 'Estrid' may not even be Estrid at all, and perhaps societal expectations persuaded the archaeologists to create a narrative more appealing for the public, cultivating what they expect and want to see rather than what the archaeology can tell us (Back Danielsson 2017: 197–200; Holtorf 2005: 549–550; Holtorf 2007: 108). The image created of Estrid is almost stereotypically Scandinavian: tall, blonde and with blue eyes. She is further portrayed as being a young woman in most presentations, though the skeleton discovered is osteologically much older (Back Danielsson 2017: 202), which speaks much about contemporary society's obsession with youth and fears surrounding ageing (Tveskov and Erlandson 2007). Additionally, popular culture has appropriated the supposed name of the Viking-period woman as the title of a quintessential Scandinavian lifestyle magazine – *Estrid* – further building a mythology around the person (Back Danielsson 2017: 203–204; Holtorf 2005: 545; Thorn 2019: 2–3) (Figure 2).

This trend is not limited to Estrid only, but as Halewood and Hannam (2001: 574–575) discuss, reconstructed Viking festivals and markets such as Jorvik, Heysham and Fotevikens intertwine popular culture and archaeology, but can run the risk of showcasing demonstrably stereotypical Viking elements such as weapons, drinking horns and jewellery alongside more carefully crafted replicas used by serious re-enactors (McPhaul 2016: 80). However, this is part and parcel with festivals and presentations on the Vikings, as both faithful, intricate replicated Viking material culture and more stereotypical,



Figure 2: 'Estrid – a true Viking': the reconstruction of a Viking-period individual on display in Stockholms Läns Museum is inspired by the archaeological discovery of the inhumation grave containing an adult female skeleton found close to a rune-stone bearing the name 'Estrid'. Photographs by Mattias Ek, 2010 (top-right, bottom-right) and Elisabeth Boogh, 2019 (left) (reproduced with permission of the Stockholms Läns Museum)

demonstrative Viking-inspired objects such as swords, horned helmets and their like will appeal to everyone from a variety of backgrounds and age-ranges (Kobiałka 2013: 150; Kobiałka 2017: 222; Ward 2001). Using commonly understood symbols and objects allows one to understand the Vikings on their own terms, whilst the reconstructions and re-enactors allow these objects and experiences to truly come to life (Coombe 1993; Kobiałka 2013: 143; Halewood and Hannam 2001: 566; Holtorf 2007:). Moreover,



Figure 3: A marketing photograph for the 2019 JORVIK Viking Festival with the theme of ‘The Untold Story of Women in the Viking Age’ (reproduced with the permission of York Archaeological Trust)

re-enactors can be significant in helping one understand early medieval people as once-living humans, rather than as distant, shadowy, figures (Kobialka 2017: 220). Re-enactors also come not only from a purely academic background, but historical re-enactment encourages people from all backgrounds to partake in a common interest in a tangible, physical way. Additionally, these markets and festivals, and in some cases, the re-enactors themselves, use the opportunity to present experimental archaeology and open discussions on a multitude of Viking-period topics from reconstructed music, mythology and current archaeological themes to the public and academics alike (Kobialka 2013: 156; Nichola and Wylie. 2012: 57; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 14; Williams 2016). Within the 2019 iteration of the Jorvik festival, the theme was ‘The Untold Story of Women in the Viking Age’ (Williams 2019) (Figure 3). Emphasis was placed on portrayal of shield-maidens and warrior women within both popular culture and archaeology, inspired in large part by the recent reinterpretation of Birka chamber grave Bj581. This reflects a growing trend in both academic research and popular culture for the inclusion of women in Viking-period archaeological and historical narratives, both in a negative, fetishising light as the ultimate sexualised fantasy figure, but also in a positive light as one component of multi-faceted role models for both women and men in contemporary society (Finke and Shichtman 2011: 155; Kobialka 2017: 220; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 12; Trafford 2019 Tveskov and Erlandson 2007). Though many have critiqued heritage displays, demonstrably inaccurate elements such as horned helmets, drinking horns or fake weapons are a way in which one can *experience* ‘Viking-ness’, through real, material terms (Addyman 1994; Kobialka 2013:143; McPhaul 2016: 2).

Admittedly, there is still an issue of how effective it is to experience ‘Viking-ness’ in museums and heritage sites. Viking-period people, as we have seen, are often presented in terms of generic tropes such as ‘mother’, ‘warrior’, ‘King’, to name but a few (Addyman 1994; Hempen 1991: 3; McPhaul 2016: 13).

These tropes fit into the archetypal formula many are comfortable and familiar with, and have come to be what is expected when one consumes Viking themed commodities (Halewood and Hannam 2001: 577; Holtorf 2007; McPhaul 2016: 16). ‘Viking’ material and visual cultures then create a constellation of inter-related Viking attributes, notably horned helmets, ships, and drinking horns, conjectured in the popular imagination (McPhaul 2016: 58-59; Ward 2001). Such images have been heavily ingrained in the public’s consciousness for generations, notably in the Victorian period within multiple plays, operas, and illustrations for the Edda and sagas. These commodities have become part of a package and we have inherited and such oversimplification is beginning to be remedied in popular culture, in the *Norsemen* series, a Norwegian comedy series parodies the way in which the Vikings (and specifically the television show *Vikings*) have been appropriated and fetishised by Western contemporary society. They do this while still providing a relatively faithful depiction of early medieval people, even addressing the impracticalities of horned helmets and the concept of *holmgang* within the show, whilst still being self-aware, and entertaining (Holtorf 2005; Mudhar 2011; Sawyer and Sawyer 2015).

Importantly, the way in which archaeology and popular culture about the Vikings interact is almost a symbiotic relationship, neither would be successful without the other to help bolster it. Halewood and Hannam (2001) argue that no other time period in archaeology garners as much interest with the public (McPhaul 2016: 2-4; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007). Stereotypes in popular culture should not always be viewed as negative, indeed for the Vikings it has solidified their presence in the public’s consciousness (Holtorf 2005), and can still be informative whilst also being engaging and *fun*. There is no disrespect for the Vikings in mass media, indeed it is almost a reverence instead, and the Vikings portrayed are given realistic, human emotions which parallel our own, making them far more real to us now than perhaps in previous generations (Baram and York 2004: 20; Holtorf 2005: 547; Kobińska 2017: 221; Service 1998: 11-15). The wealth of music, games, film, books and television series existing in conjunction with archaeological research and dissemination only proves that the public want to learn more about the Viking people from multiple viewpoints and opinions (Mcphaul 2016: 2-3). This enables a more complex and intricate portrait of the Vikings for the public and academics alike to enjoy and participate in (Ashby 2014; Appadurai 1986: 33; Fell 1993: 90; Finke 2011: 151-154; Harty 2011a: 3-5; Holtorf 2007: 108-109; Nicholas and Wylie 2012: 14 Sawyer and Sawyer 2015: 13-14).

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Part 2

The Public Dark Ages

The Vikings of JORVIK: 40 Years of Reconstruction and Re-enactment

Chris Tuckley

There is sparse academic literature critically evaluating the display of the Early Middle Ages in museums and heritage sites. While JORVIK is frequently cited and widely lauded as a famous and successful case study in the portrayal of life in a Viking-period town, staging narratives informed directly by archaeological discoveries uncovered on the very site where it stands, its forty-year history has hitherto not been surveyed and evaluated. This chapter reviews the trends in critical responses to JORVIK between 1984 and April 2017, when it reopened after a period of closure due to flooding. It examines in detail just one aspect of its evolution over this time: its shifting depiction of the figure of the Viking in its exhibitions, publications and marketing materials. In doing so, the chapter aims to stand both as a record of the major changes in JORVIK's interpretative practice, and as a platform from which comparative evaluations with other museums and heritage sites might be attempted in future.

Introduction

In 1984, the JORVIK Viking Centre became the first and only permanent venue in the UK wholly dedicated to the investigation and representation of the Viking period in Britain and the wider Viking world. Having welcomed 19 million visitors in its first 35 years of operation, it is an established feature of York's portfolio of heritage attractions, with an annual visitor footfall exceeded only by the National Railway Museum and York Minster (at the time of writing: June 2019). It is a significant contributor to the prosperity of the city: its annual JORVIK Viking Festival generates an estimated £6.6 million for the local economy (Make it York 2018).

Since first opening, JORVIK has made use of a range of techniques to represent and embody the residents of 10th-century York. Archaeologists, historians, museum professionals, re-enactors and a huge number of individuals working in the creative sector have all played a part in developing its vision of a Viking York and the people who lived there. The image that has arisen through their various contributions is one which has shifted over time, both shaping and being shaped by wider trends in popular narratives of the Viking period, as well as by academic research in archaeology and related disciplines.

The closure of JORVIK due to flooding over the Christmas period in 2015 and its subsequent 're-imagining' and re-opening in April 2017 presented an opportunity to JORVIK's staff to reconsider the ways in which Vikings are portrayed in and around the Centre. Those tasked with the emergency response looked back to earlier iterations of JORVIK to make sense of the steps to be taken towards its future: there was much of value to be preserved, but there were also changes to be made. In my role as Head of Interpretation and Engagement for the JORVIK Group, I would have valued a full narrative history of the attraction for additional guidance in this process, but this had yet to be written and this situation persists. Others have felt the lack too, and the present chapter has been written in response to the many enquiries that JORVIK receives from researchers each year, as a first step in assembling institutional information from a range of sources. To this synthesis of the official story of JORVIK, I have added some of my own recollections and observations from my time working in a range of roles at JORVIK since first beginning my career there in 2004.

I have set myself the modest task of constructing a narrative account of just one facet of the JORVIK project: the changing figure of 'the Viking' in all four versions of the Centre that have operated to date. In addition, by identifying some of the trends in critical responses to JORVIK's Vikings over the past 40 years (the vast



Figure 1: Coppergate dig postcard image (YAT Archive)

majority of which have been focused on the version of the attraction that operated in the period 1984–2000), it is hoped that this chapter will act as a spur to deeper analysis and more informed commentary, to better assess JORVIK's place amongst popular representations of the Viking world, and the ways in which changes at JORVIK correspond to changes in contemporary archaeological and museological theory and practice.

JORVIK has been an attractive case study or point of reference for academics working in a range of fields, principally museum studies, archaeology, public history and medieval studies. It has become clear in the preparation of this piece, however, that extended historiographical and museological analysis bearing on JORVIK in particular, and Viking exhibitions more generally, is sparse. JORVIK is profiled in a short piece on popular Viking-themed attractions and tourist destinations (Morrison 2000), while a subsequent piece covers some of the same ground, although it deals with JORVIK in greater depth via its critique of authenticity and commodification at Viking heritage sites (Halewood and Hannam 2001).

JORVIK's departure from traditional museum-based interpretation and display techniques made it an indispensable point of reference in debates on the rise of a 'heritage industry' (Hewison 1987: 84; Meethan 1996; Rojek 1993: 151) and the desirability and educational value of harnessing the methods and mechanisms of the theme park (Fowler 1992: 116–117; Silver 1988). JORVIK has also featured more or less prominently in a number of unpublished postgraduate research projects (Maloney 1999; Mordue 1999; Service 1998; Wilson 2016). It is mentioned only briefly in Guðrún Dröfn Whitehead's thesis on Viking exhibitions and their role in the construction of collective and personal identities (Whitehead 2013): the appearance in print of the same author's forthcoming *The Performance of Viking Identity in Museums: Useful Heritage in England, Iceland and Norway* should go some way towards remedying the general dearth of material available to researchers.

The power and popularity of the term 'Viking' lies in its mutability, and this might explain the restricted critical academic attention it has received to date. Here, 'Viking' is applied in the sense that it carries at JORVIK today: a loose, catch-all adjective for the men, women and children of 10th-century York and the wider social, cultural and trade networks within which they operated, together with their mannequin or live interpreter referents at JORVIK. Shifts in the meaning of the term in settings both academic and popular have been remarked on for many years now, with the state of play in the 21st century briefly

discussed elsewhere (Andersson 2016; Carroll *et al.* 2014: 131–34; Ljunggren and Svanberg 2016; Svanberg 2016; Williams *et al.* 2014: 21–23). Two other recent collections (Eriksen *et al.* 2015; Harty 2011) are useful supplements on Vikings in historical fiction, particularly as it pertains in on-screen representations of the Viking world. Notably, Neil Price (2015) offers a brief survey of the Vikings’ evolution over the last 100 years, when popular conceptions of a Viking world have had a fundamental, defining role in academic treatments of the same, and vice versa. By the 1970s and 80s, Price tells us, a new consensus had been reached, with the Vikings reviving in a ‘new and more peaceable incarnation, their warrior stereotypes not exactly forgotten but instead giving way to a cosmopolitan population of traders, crafts-workers, travellers and poets’ (Price 2015: 2). Significantly, Judith Jesch had earlier highlighted JORVIK’s own contribution to this process of ‘creating a new historical myth to replace the old one’:

This new view of peaceful, urban vikings, based mainly on archaeological finds, presents images of women and children as well as men. Vikings are now people. Is it possible, then, that there is such a thing as a ‘viking woman’? (Jesch 1991: 2)

JORVIK #1: 1984

The version of JORVIK seen and referred to by Jesch came into being on the site of the Coppergate dig of 1976–1981, carried out by York Archaeological Trust (hereafter: YAT). A lively account of the dig and JORVIK’s earliest beginnings is provided by Peter Addyman, at that time Director of YAT, and Anthony Gaynor, the JORVIK Project Director, in a retrospective piece (Addyman and Gaynor 1984). They describe how the excavation uncovered the waterlogged and well-preserved remains of a corner of York inhabited during the city’s Anglo-Scandinavian age, generally characterised as a period

commencing with the city’s fall to a Viking Great Army in 866 and continuing up to the years of the Norman Conquest. The dig attracted more than 500,000 visitors, whose purchase of souvenirs and admission tickets helped to fund the excavation. Although layers from every period in York’s history were represented in the discoveries made on site, the excavation was branded a ‘Viking Dig’ in a canny and profitable exercise in public relations, capitalising on a pre-existing Viking brand (in the sense of a distinctive combination of marketable imagery and attributes). The potential for a self-funding, permanent attraction was clear, and the concept of a JORVIK Viking Centre was born, to display and interpret the Viking-period archaeology of the Coppergate area.

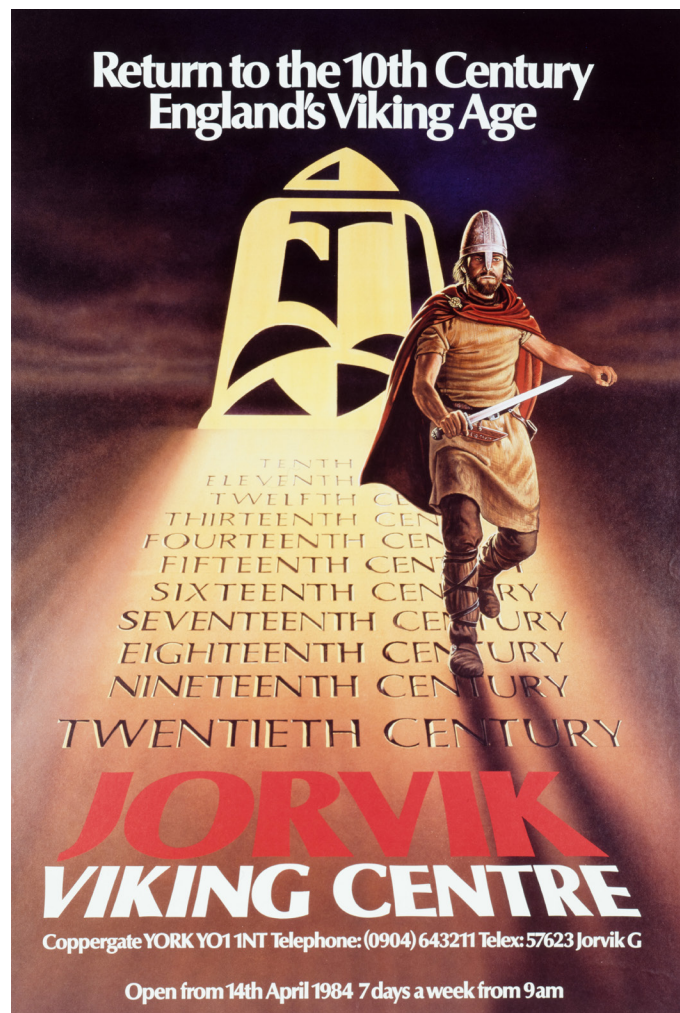


Figure 2: 1984 poster artwork for JORVIK (YAT Archive)

The earliest depictions of Vikings associated with the Coppergate dig and JORVIK were those featuring in YAT's *Interim* publication, many of which were the work of its in-house artist, Sheena Howarth. Her imaginative reconstruction of the city of Jorvik appears on the cover of a short guidebook by the Director of the Coppergate dig, Richard Hall (Figure 1; Hall 1993). The book was reprinted on several occasions, first appearing in 1979 and remaining on sale at JORVIK until the mid-1990s. The cover image was also sold as a postcard. It shows an urban landscape populated by a scattering of tiny, indeterminate figures going about a variety of tasks. The impression given is of a peaceful city: there are no weapons in sight. In the foreground are two men, closely resembling in their dress, hairstyles and beards the paired male figures carved on an Anglo-Scandinavian cross shaft (currently held by York Museums Trust as YORYM: 1979.53) from the church of St Mary Bishophill Junior, a building which appears prominently in the same scene.

Poster artwork (Figure 2) announcing the advent of JORVIK presents the figure of a male Viking once again, but this image emphasises his warlike aspect: helmeted and with sword drawn he advances on the viewer against a backdrop of the first JORVIK logo, a design described in an early piece of promotional literature as 'a stylised head of Erik Bloodaxe, the last Viking King of York' (JORVIK Times 1983: 1).

Other early contributors to an emerging iconography of the Vikings of York belonged to the re-enactment community. 1985 saw the first JORVIK Viking Festival, which has been staged every February since, and which attracts large numbers of re-enactors to the city, some belonging to groups commissioned to provide events or activities on behalf of JORVIK. An image of the Coppergate dig in 1976 shows an early visit by a party of costumed Vikings, members of the Norse Film and Pageant Society, the ancestor of several large Viking re-enactment groups that operate in the UK today (JORVIK Companion Guide 2017: 10).

Three of the 17 re-enactors pictured in 1976 are women, and there are two children; the men are all equipped with armour, weapons or both. The tendency for high-status male warriors to be disproportionately present in living history re-enactments of the distant past has been remarked on with respect to Roman re-enactment in the UK (Appleby 2005), but holds true for Viking events too.

As we have already seen, however, by 1984 the term 'Viking' as exclusively applicable to armed males or denoting only martial pursuits was already undergoing revision in popular histories of the period. This was in no small part due to the widespread interest that had been fostered by the Coppergate dig and its extensive coverage in print and broadcast media. The vast majority of the artefacts uncovered related more obviously to crafting, trading and the necessities of everyday life than to warfare or raiding (Hall 1984). A landmark Viking exhibition at the British Museum in 1980 (which toured subsequently to New York and Minneapolis) acknowledged violence, looting and destruction as defining characteristics of the period, whilst stressing the urban, domestic and artistic sides of Viking life, an approach exemplified in the marketing materials produced at the time (Maloney 1999: 85-87). Coinciding with these developments, 1980 also saw the transmission of a ten-part BBC documentary series, *Vikings!*, with an accompanying non-fiction book by the historian and TV personality Magnus Magnusson, chairman of the stewards' committee for the Coppergate dig and a high-profile supporter of the JORVIK project. Contemporary listings for the series highlight the ways in which it set out to explore the complexities of Viking identity:

Pagan poets and wrathful fishermen? Merciless farmers and valiant craftsmen? The Vikings were an extraordinary people - complex, brilliant, unpredictable and difficult to define. Tonight MAGNUS MAGNUSSON, himself the descendant of Vikings, looks for the spirit of the Viking age: the ships, the sagas, the heroism and the obsessions which accompanied them to the farthest edges of the world. (BBC Genome Project 2018)

In York, the Yorkshire Museum's temporary exhibitions on a Viking theme, *The Viking Kingdom of York* (1976) and *The Vikings in England* (1982), pursued similar themes to great success, attracting 78,000 and 235,000 visitors respectively (Pyrah 1988: 136-142). The latter was mounted by an independent body, the Anglo-

Danish Viking Project, and involved many of the leading Viking experts of the day. Of the featured artefacts from museums across Britain and Denmark, half had been recovered by YAT at Coppergate. Prior to opening in York the exhibition toured to two venues in Denmark, at Brede and Moesgård. At the Yorkshire Museum, it incorporated a 'complete thatched Viking house' within its newly constructed 'framework of cases and corridors' (Pyrah 1988: 142). In October 1983, the Yorkshire Museum unveiled its new permanent Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian gallery (Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1984: 26) to display material from its collection alongside artefacts from Coppergate.

This, then, was the setting for JORVIK's arrival on the local and national heritage and tourism scene. In its first years of operation, it excited a huge amount of commentary and coverage in both popular media and academic writing, much of which turned on the notion that JORVIK represented a range of innovative approaches to popularising archaeology and making it comprehensible to non-specialist audiences: not all of it was favourable (Maloney 1999: 68-82).

In financial terms, however, JORVIK was an immediate success. Funding for the project had come from bank loans and a grant from the English Tourist Board; its viability depended on attracting 500,000 visitors annually. This figure was easily surpassed: in each of JORVIK's first two years of operation, just under 900,000 attended (Addyman and Gaynor 1984: 10). The earliest visitors to JORVIK descended into a basement constructed within the excavation footprint, stepping into 'a carefully programmed sequential experience designed to build up in logical steps an understanding of Viking York, the archaeological process, and the significance both of the Viking contribution to the city's history and the archaeologist's role in elucidating it' (Addyman and Gaynor 1984: 11). First in the visit sequence was an orientation space, providing information intended to establish a historical context for the Viking-themed material to follow; next came a ride in 'time cars', down a 'time tunnel' to represent regression through 1000 years of York's history, then around a reconstruction of the Viking-period streets, houses and workshops uncovered during the dig, and a vignette of the excavation in progress. Alighting from the time cars, visitors passed through a conservation lab set into a more conventional museum gallery space, with small finds from Coppergate on display. The final element in the sequence was the shop. In spite of the many changes at JORVIK since 1984, this model still provides the core around which JORVIK visits are structured. This is partly due to the constraints placed on making changes to the layout of the attraction because of its basement setting, and partly because of the necessity to regulate visitor flow

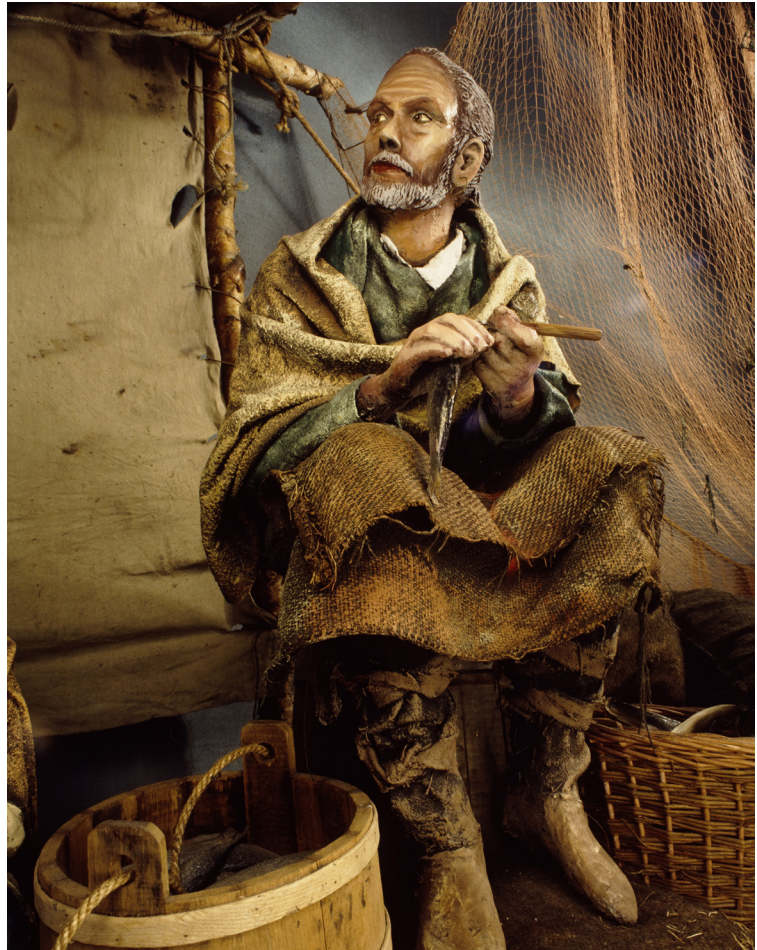


Figure 3: Eymund the fisherman from JORVIK #1, 1984 (YAT Archive)

through an underground attraction: the time cars were originally conceived of as a means of achieving a steady and even flow of visitor traffic for fire safety reasons (Addyman and Gaynor 1984: 13).

The Vikings encountered in 1984 in the course of a visit to JORVIK, the crafters, traders and families in mannequin form that inhabited the reconstruction, belonged to the emerging tradition of the homely city dweller, with one commentator describing them as ‘the apogee of the house-trained Viking’ (Hills 1986: 178). John Sunderland, the JORVIK Project Designer, recalls in his memoir *On my Way to Jorvik* the principles on which the figures dwelling in the houses were designed:

All we really could do in the end was create a detailed and believably realistic setting and, with help from the archaeologists, speculate on what their lives were like. We’d have to create the people living their ordinary everyday lives. They’d be anything but stiff blank museum dummies; they’d look as though they had been stopped in motion, mid-sentence. Grandfather sitting over there (I imagined), his daughter and her daughter ignoring him as they sit cooking over the open hearth in the centre of the floor amongst the ashes... (Sunderland 2014: 124–125).

The debt owed by JORVIK to the 20th-century kitchen-sink drama is hinted at in the promotional *JORVIK Times* publication, which looks back to the Coppergate dig as having provided ‘a peep through the keyhole straight into the lives of Viking people, a kind of backyard Coronation Street’ (JORVIK Times 1983: 1). The impulse to capture the Viking-period city in its vernacular is reflected in Sunderland’s decision to commission the Yorkshire-based sculptor Graham Ibbeson, who has gone on to work on a number of celebrated public art pieces, to create 26 original figures (Sunderland 2014: 202–203) as inhabitants for the cityscape (Figure 3). Ibbeson’s style has been characterised as ‘superhumanist’; Nicholas Treadwell, one of the main proponents of superhumanism and an associate of Ibbeson, coined this term to describe a movement emerging in the counter-culture of the 1960s and ’70s as a reaction against the dominance of middle- and upper-class values in the British art scene, prioritising emotional content and response over aesthetic concerns (Treadwell 2010). Ibbeson described his approach to the JORVIK commission in an interview for a Yorkshire Television documentary:

A lot of them are modelled on my family, the design team and also people in the street, [...] people in the local boozer, so they have a, like, northern flavour. [...] There’s potential movement in all the figures, and that helps to animate the whole museum. (Jorvik: the Vikings Return 1984)

Ibbeson’s creations and those of Derek Freeborn, who made the figures populating the time tunnel, were disparaged in Schadla-Hall’s review of JORVIK, in which the former were described as ‘rather poorly executed [albeit] in very authentic dress’, and the latter as ‘rather unrealistic monochrome mannequins’ (Schadla-Hall 1984: 62). Despite some changes and substitutions, however, the work of both artists remained in place until the first major renovation of JORVIK in 2000.

While Ibbeson’s figures were ‘stopped in motion’, providing static snapshots of everyday life, an audio commentary provided via speakers in the time cars and an ambient soundtrack established a lively and immersive contextual framework through which to apprehend them. The script of the commentary, spoken by Magnusson, is sparing in the detail that it gives about the Vikings on display (Script for JORVIK #1 1984). It evokes a more strongly patriarchal Viking-period society than is evident in some of the other modes of interpretation used at JORVIK in 1984, one from which women as individuals are conspicuously absent: the commentary mentions only a ‘craftsman’, an ‘old chap’, and a ‘fisherman’, plus three named males: the boy Toki, his father, Ormr, and his grandfather, Karl. The presence of women is inferred only from references to occupations traditionally carried out by women or in allusions to family activities around the hearth.

This is not the case in the script of the ambient soundtrack, published for sale in the JORVIK shop as *Jorvikinga Saga: the Saga of the Jorvik Vikings* (Fell 1984). Composed in Old English and Old Norse by

Professor Christine E. Fell, a specialist in Old English vocabulary and semantics at the University of Nottingham, it includes an introduction and references throughout to the sources that have been used to inspire the dialogue to be heard on the JORVIK set. These range from archaeological finds from Coppergate and elsewhere to art historical evidence, Old English documentary sources and inscriptions, medieval Icelandic sagas and place-names containing Old Norse elements. The events that we witness at JORVIK, the text tells us, take place in late autumn, 948. The women of JORVIK play a greater role in the drama than is evident from the ride commentary, and Fell's text sets out the dialogue spoken by the women Gunnvör, Leoba, Gyða, and Ása, and the girls Hildr and Inga. Much of the dialogue is concerned with the recent visit of the infamous Viking Egill Skallagrímsson to the city, as detailed in the Old Norse *Egil's Saga*, so Egill's mortal enemy Queen Gunnhildr, the wife of Erik Bloodaxe, is also mentioned: Arinbjörn, a character from the saga, is present too, buying rings from Snarri the jeweller with which to reward his men.

The impressive levels of detail included in the soundtrack and the meaning of the dialogue, however, were inaccessible to all but those who invested in the printed text; writing in 1986, Catherine Hills wondered 'how many visitors realize they are not hearing rhubarb, but genuine Old Norse, spoken by leading scholars in the field?' (Hills 1986: 179). One prominent visitor, the critic Robert Hewison, did not: in an influential piece of polemic on the rise of Britain's heritage industry, Hewison misrepresented his visit as a 'tour round the recreation of a tenth-century village, peopled with dummies speaking twentieth-century Icelandic' (Hewison 1987: 84).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the fullest early critiques of JORVIK's representation of the people of 10th-century York focused on its depiction of women and gender roles. Nancy Jo Chabot looked at the instances of male and female figures in imagery throughout JORVIK (her numbers suggest an approximate 70:30 ratio), and compared the activities in which they were engaged: the men were active and at large, making, selling and fixing, whereas the women were either at home in smoky interiors, cooking and weaving, or otherwise out shopping (Chabot 1988). Her theme is taken up by Susan M. Pearce, who reflects on an androcentric bias in European museums which mirrors broader social patterns, drawing comparisons between contemporary displays at the Jewry Wall Museum in Leicester and JORVIK:

These displays are retained primarily because the families reflect our own, and are therefore easy to understand and so comfortable and unchallenging to the visitor. The same kinds of criticism can be applied to the representation of women at Jorvik, and, of course, the same objections arise in the male-based language used in labels and guide-books. (Pearce 1990: 61)

In 1984, JORVIK's representation of women and its vision of a Viking world in which activity is divided along gender lines were essentially conservative in character, but not necessarily any more conservative than contemporary and subsequent academic writing on Viking society, which Lena Mortensen characterises as encumbered by 'notions of gender derived from the ethnographic present' whenever women's lives and roles are discussed (Mortensen 2004: 100). Moreover, JORVIK's creators and operators were not blind to the ethical challenges inherent in their approach. Writing six years after JORVIK opened, Peter Addyman observed:

Museum directors and curators have a responsibility akin to that of newspaper editors and television and radio producers. Indeed, the moral responsibilities may be all the greater, since museums are less obviously interpreters, and their displays last longer. Moreover, the public unconsciously assumes that museums, in presenting the material evidence from the past, are offering something that is somehow objective, not subjective. (Addyman 1990: 257)

Addyman's words go to the heart of the critique of JORVIK's representation of the archaeological process set out by Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley for the first time in 1987, in which the act of interpreting the archaeology of Coppergate seems to be author-less, a revelation of a 'true' past, passively received by visitors via the labours of the 'archaeologist-hero' (Shanks and Tilley 1992: 86–90). Shanks and Tilley do not concern themselves with JORVIK's Vikings (emphasising instead the mannequin representations of archaeologists in the excavation and conservation lab vignettes), but their observation that JORVIK attempts to finally isolate the past 'in realistic photographic detail, fixed and certain' (Shanks and Tilley 1992: 89) has particular resonance for the next development in JORVIK's representations of its Viking populace.

1991 saw the introduction of a new Viking figure on the JORVIK set. Its face was developed via reconstruction techniques used at University College Hospital, London, to forecast the results of facial surgery. A skull from a burial excavated by YAT at an early-medieval cemetery on Fishergate, York, was used as the basis for the reconstruction. Ibbeson's figure of Eymund, gutting fish in JORVIK's wharf scene, was chosen as a suitable candidate for replacement: because the individual had been buried at Fishergate, 'the inference was that he made his living by fish, whether as a merchant or as an actual fisherman' (Wilson 2002: 155).

A model of Eymund's head, based on a combination of laser scans of the medieval skull and the face of a 20th-century volunteer of the same sex and age, was first produced at half scale in foam using a computer-linked milling machine. The York-based sculptor Lynne O'Dowd made a full-size sculpture of Eymund based on this model (Figure 4). The *Museums Journal* for April 1991 includes a feature introducing the foam model as the first step in a programme 'to replace the heads of the figures with high-tech models featuring the faces of 'real' 10th-century people' (Davies 1991). A contemporary press release quoted Peter Addyman:

The figure is unnervingly real. It is quite staggering to meet an almost thousand-year-old face like this; probably the first time anyone has met the gaze of someone from the Viking age. This has been a real breakthrough. (Wilson 2002: 155)

Seven more figures produced using the same techniques were introduced in 1994 (York Archaeological Trust 1995: 32–33). A JORVIK television advert made for broadcast on Tyne Tees in the same year had an actor portraying one of these, Gamall, inviting viewers in subtitled Old Norse to join him 'on a trip through time... listen to the sounds, find out why our city smelled, meet Eymund the fisherman who tells tales of his adventures... [and] see why we stayed in Jorvik'. Like Eymund, some of these figures

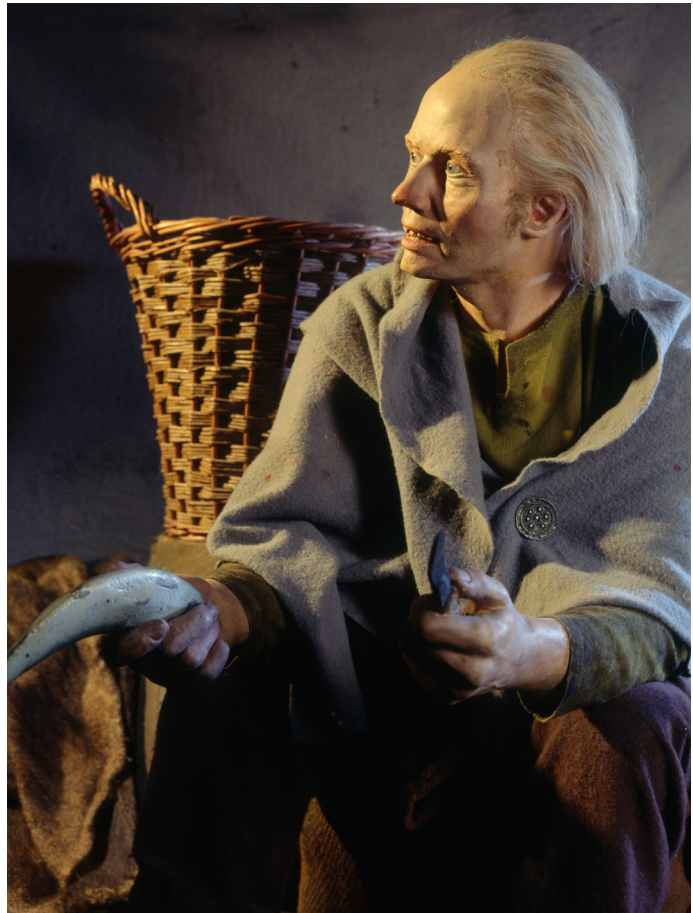


Figure 4: Eymund the fisherman from JORVIK #2, 1991 (YAT Archive)

(and more like them introduced in 1995) remained in place until they were caught up in the flood of December 2015.

In 2000, a temporary exhibition, *Skullsplitter*, exhibited a full skeleton from the Fishergate cemetery in conjunction with pieces of Viking-period weaponry in JORVIK's artefact gallery (York Archaeological Trust 2000: 26). The skeleton was one of a group from Fishergate exhibiting clear signs of peri-mortem violence. *Skullsplitter*, which took its title from the lurid nickname of a 10th-century Earl of Orkney, was the first instance of human bones going on display within JORVIK's galleries; Hedley Swain situates this earliest use of skeletal material at JORVIK within the context of a contemporary debate around the use and repatriation of human remains, which had already found expression in the cultural heritage sector in 1998 with the Museum of London's *London Bodies* exhibition (Swain 2013: 174–175). The decision to mount the exhibition was taken in the run-up to JORVIK's first major refurbishment as a marketable initiative to boost visitor numbers, an aim in which it was judged successful (York Archaeological Trust 2001: 30); the then Director of Attractions and Project Manager for the refurbishment, Richard Kemp, had directed the Fishergate excavations and their publication, and the injuries to the skeletons had very recently come to light.

As well as bearing witness to violence in early medieval York, this skeleton and others like it provide evidence for a range of pathologies due to deficiencies in diet, sanitation or healthcare, all of which are highlighted in panel text and in talks by interactive staff members whenever skeletons are put on display at JORVIK Group attractions. This use of skeletal material, available in abundance from several of YAT's excavations of cemetery sites, has continued and expanded at JORVIK, its sister attractions, and its touring exhibitions in the years since.

JORVIK #2: 2001

JORVIK closed its doors in 2000 for its first major refurbishment, funded by a bank loan, reopening in April the following year. The stated rationale for the redevelopment was twofold: to update the reconstruction of the Viking-age landscape in the light of new archaeological research, and 'to harness new technology and story telling techniques' (York Archaeological Trust 2000: 24). In addition, there were concerns about the continuing viability of the time cars (York Archaeological Trust 2001: 30), which were estimated to have covered over 70,000 miles in the course of their working lives (Anon. 2000). A temporary exhibition, *The Jorvik Story*, was mounted in the St Mary Castlegate venue next door while the work took place. It contained parts of the JORVIK set moved wholesale from their original location, plus *Skullsplitter*: both exhibitions went on to feature at the Byggðasafn Hafnarfjarðar museum in Iceland between 2001 and 2003 (York Archaeological Trust 2002: 24). As well as replacing the ride's time cars with new six-seater capsules carried on an overhead track, the aim was to create a 'greatly refined and completely up-to-date view of part of a Viking Age town' based on the research into the archaeology of Coppergate that had taken place since 1984, much of which had appeared in print in twelve fascicules from YAT's *Archaeology of York* series (Kemp 2001). Some of this had already been applied when the new figures were introduced between 1991 and 1995, especially insofar as it related to costume and textiles.

The dateline for this version of JORVIK shifted later from 948 to 975 in light of the latest analyses of the Coppergate site. The audio commentary by Magnusson was replaced by a new recording of the TV historian Michael Wood, and the dialogue of the soundtrack was greatly simplified in favour of a general hubbub of the voices and sounds of industry associated with a densely occupied urban setting. Notes on JORVIK's new Coppergate street-market scene, circulated amongst the JORVIK team and the exhibition designers (who here term the attraction 'JVC2'), convey a concern to achieve this impression through sound:

This is the culmination of the entire visit and indeed is likely to be considered by many to equate with JVC2... The street is just one of dozens found in Jorvik, and in this case it is Viking-Age Coppergate. It is very busy. There is some movement supplied by human and animal animatronics (but used subtly and economically); there is lots of noise and bustle, and it is clearly very urban. All visitors will at this point understand that 'Village' is an inappropriate term to use when describing the settlement portrayed. (Draft of detailed specification for JVC2 1999)

No personal names are provided in this version of the commentary (Script for JORVIK #2 2001). The blacksmith, his neighbour the woodturner, and a Viking on the toilet are mentioned, but little coverage is given to the women of the city. 2001 saw the introduction of a children's commentary for the ride, voiced in modern English by Toki, a young boy represented in mannequin form on the set. Toki had first appeared in *JORVIK Times* as a cartoon drawing, in the context of a prize draw feature: readers were asked to suggest a name for the figure from a list of 10th-century-appropriate possibilities (*JORVIK Times* 1983: 4). Toki was the winning option, and was later made the central character in Christine Fell's *Toki in Jorvik*, a children's narrative guidebook to the JORVIK set, as well as featuring amongst Ibbeson's sculptures. Toki has appeared in a range of guises in every version of JORVIK since.



Figure 5: Blafotr, modelled on Matt Baker, 2001 (YAT Archive)

Although the new commentary implied that the technology first employed to create Eymund's face had been used throughout (with the process illustrated and dramatised as the ride capsule carried visitors past a display of rotating model skulls scanned by lasers), sharp-eyed visitors would have spotted a male trader in the Coppergate market scene whose brooch carried the *Blue Peter* logo; this figure's features were in fact based on those of the TV presenter Matt Baker, who supplied a cast of his face as part of a JORVIK segment for the show (Figure 5). A *Blue Peter* dog featured nearby in replica form (Anon. 2001).

Sixteen new figures were produced to join those carried over from the previous version of JORVIK. A number of these used animatronic technology to produce movement within a limited range. The design brief for the figures has the women and girls engaged in some of the same activities as those set out in the brief for the previous version of JORVIK (Sunderland 2014: 202–203): playing, shopping, spinning, storytelling and baking. To these are added grinding flour and stall-keeping. A new figure, named in the design notes as 'Gutha', is pregnant and resting in a doorway. Gutha appears in conjunction with a



Figure 6: Hearth and Home, JORVIK artefacts gallery, 2001 (YAT Archive)

new male figure, named in the design notes as 'Arinbjörn', her husband. These two correspond to a pair of figures from the previous version of JORVIK, although *Jorvikinga Saga* is less specific about the relationship between the two, calling Gyða a 'kinswoman' of Arinbjörn (Fell 1984: 10). In terms of the ratio of male to female mannequins too, the picture was one of continuity rather than change, with roughly twice as many male figures as female on display, a pattern which has persisted throughout every version of JORVIK to have operated to date. This is in part due to the legacy of JORVIK's original

male-dominated *dramatis personae*, whose characters have been reproduced across the years, and to the fact that its Viking mannequins were defined *ab initio* by their professions (as suggested by the artefacts found during the Coppergate dig); their artisanal and mercantile pursuits were arguably still largely a male preserve in what Mortensen would describe as the ‘ethnographic present’ of the late 1970s and early 1980s.



Figure 7: Drifa, Artefacts Alive (Hearth and Home, JORVIK artefacts gallery), 2006 (YAT Archive)

Further changes at JORVIK, however, offered new opportunities for the representation of female Viking characters. 2002 saw the appointment of a new Commercial Manager (later Director of Attractions), Sarah Maltby, who ushered in a greatly expanded role for costumed staff members, now encountered at several points in the visit. Costumed staff had featured at JORVIK before (Mordue 1999: 216), but this 'interactive' team fulfilled a more integrated operational role in and around the attraction: they staffed the 'time machine' portion of the centre, an audio-visual installation that simulated a journey back in time through the changing York landscape (which replaced the earlier orientation area); they also patrolled the refurbished artefacts gallery, giving talks on such matters as Viking weapons and warfare at timed slots in the course of the day, and struck replica coins for purchase by visitors. Although the language used by the interactive staff conformed to the 'third-person' mode of interpretation, staff had Viking names and could give details about their lives in York should visitors require it, or to benefit younger visitors or school parties wishing to interact with a 'real' Viking. With a roughly 50:50 ratio of female to male staff members, the interactive team opened the way for a fuller and more nuanced representation of women in Viking York. The team remains an integral part of the JORVIK front-of-house staff; members are given relative freedom in constructing a Viking identity for themselves (within the parameters of historical accuracy set out by their team leaders), with the result that visitors wishing to talk to the costumed staff they encounter will receive complex, highly individualised perspectives on Viking York.

Along with the interactive staff members, the refurbished artefacts gallery included Vikings in mannequin form. These inhabited large artefact cases (on the themes of 'Leatherworking', 'Hearth and Home', 'Woodworking' and 'Blacksmithing') which used the 'Pepper's Ghost' visual effect, achieved by positioning a pane of glass inside the case, between the viewer and a mannequin hidden from view: when brightly lit, the mannequin could be seen in reflection on the pane. This created the illusion of the Vikings suddenly appearing in conjunction with (and apparently interacting with) the objects around them inside the case (Figure 6).

An extract from Thomas Mordue's 1996 interview with Richard Kemp sheds light on the thinking that underpinned this new interpretative technique:

What we want to do is contextualise the displays. Let's say you touch an artefact and then all of a sudden you are surrounded by all the pigs and the geese and all the noises from the place. An idea that I've got [...] is that you can go through the middle of the house, you get a holographic effect of what you saw on the other side for seconds and all the noises etc. and you can see the people sitting there on the hearth and you can understand that that is what you saw on the other side. You can go onto the next house and that comes alive, you go to the next one and you make these connections all the time. Now that is sophisticated holographic effects [...] so the press get interested, and the TV cameras come down [...] and you've got new interest. No one has worked out exactly what we are going to do regarding the objects but context is the absolute key to it all. (Mordue 1999: 215–216)

Ten years later, in January 2006, the *Artefacts Alive* project saw the introduction of a holographic image for each case to further contextualise the artefacts on display, plus six interactive multimedia installations (York Archaeological Trust 2006: 20). Part-funded by the Millennium Commission, *Artefacts Alive* came about in response to visitor feedback asking that more information be made available in the gallery. The holograms took the form of four new characters: Mord, an unctuous leatherworker; Drifa, a cheerful housewife (Figure 7); Unni, a bumbling woodturner; and Grummi, a grumpy and menacing blacksmith. All delivered a light and humorous monologue directly to the visitor in Yorkshire-accented modern English. Irony, local humour and playful anachronisms have always featured at JORVIK (Halewood and Hannan 2001: 574–575; D'Arcens 2014: 167), one early example being a punning reference to the *Theakston's Old Peculier* brand of Yorkshire ale in the soundtrack of JORVIK #1 (Fell 1984: 17). Scatalogical humour, too,



Figure 8: The Unearthed gallery, 2003 (YAT Archive)

has always played a role, most conspicuously in the figure of a Viking man defecating in a latrine (with accompanying synthetic odours and humorous asides in the audio commentary): part of a wider tradition of conjuring a medieval period that is funny by dint of its ‘muckiness’ (Aronstein 2011: 73–74).

In the years immediately following the reopening, a number of temporary exhibitions were mounted at JORVIK. *Blood of the Vikings* coincided with a television documentary of the same name and drew on research commissioned by the BBC to investigate human remains possibly associated with those slain at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 (York Archaeological Trust 2002: 21); the exhibition displayed skeletal material from Riccall Landing alongside some of the bones with blade injuries from Fishergate, rather than any full skeletons. Subsequent exhibitions were *Viking Voyagers* (York Archaeological Trust 2002: 22), *Fearsome Craftsmen* (York Archaeological Trust 2003: 16–17), *Unearthed* (York Archaeological Trust 2004: 17) and *Are You a Viking?* (York Archaeological Trust 2007: 20); the latter two were funded by the Wellcome Trust. Their titles and contents pointed to the emergence of two clear and complementary themes hinted at in *Skullsplitter*. The first, a concern to reclaim the sanguinary side of Viking history, is persistent and is mirrored elsewhere at JORVIK, particularly in its marketing and in its retail offer. The second springs from the display of the skeletal evidence first used in *Skullsplitter* and is allied with a burgeoning popular interest in ancient DNA (Zadik 2013): locating authentic Viking individuals and identity in anatomy and in the scientific analysis of bodies at a molecular level, one of the central themes of the BBC series (BBC Genome Project 2018). At JORVIK and elsewhere the use of skeletal evidence exhibiting signs of healed or unhealed battle injuries supports both themes. *Unearthed* was a space dedicated to the scientific analysis of ancient bones, centring on a case containing the full, violence-scarred skeleton



Figure 9: The Coppergate Woman, facial reconstruction, 2010 (YAT Archive)

from Fishergate previously exhibited in *Skullsplitter* (Figure 8). It remained in place until the next refurbishment, along with *Fearsome Craftsmen*, which included an installation of a Viking-Coppergate-style shopfront that could be occupied by interactive staff members.

JORVIK #3: 2010

JORVIK underwent a partial refurbishment in two stages in the period 2009–2011. It was the first to be overseen by Sarah Maltby (York Archaeological Trust 2010: 26–27; York Archaeological Trust 2011: 25–26), with funding from the Millennium Commission and Wolfson Foundation. This ‘upgrade’ was motivated in part by a city-wide bid to increase annual visitor spend in the

aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis (Hayman 2009), and like the earlier refurbishment drew on the latest research in its updated presentation of the Viking period. As well as the JORVIK set, three areas were targeted for renewal. The time machine installed in 2001 was replaced with an orientation area containing a glass floor over a replica of part of the Coppergate dig as it appeared to the archaeologists working on it in the 1970s and ’80s: this area, known as *Discover Coppergate*, was the first instance of the dig being replicated for visitors ahead of their ride around the reconstruction in the visit sequence. The *Fearsome Craftsmen* exhibition was replaced with an *Investigate Coppergate* gallery emphasising scientific processes applied in the analysis of the archaeology. Finally, the *Unearthed* space was made smaller by the installation of the glass floor in an adjoining gallery, and from 2011 hosted *The End of the Vikings?*, which looked at the Viking legacy in northern England and elsewhere, together with those events of 1066 traditionally construed as having brought the Viking period to an end.

Investigate Coppergate contained two skeletons, one male and one female, the only near-complete examples found during the Coppergate dig, which had uncovered another two human burials in which less than 25% of the skeleton survived, and a single skull (Holst 2014: 14). The two skeletons chosen for display had been subjected to a range of investigative techniques in the run-up to the re-opening, when they were exhibited to the public for the first time. The female skeleton, referred to as ‘the Coppergate Woman’, was the most intensively studied of the two, and was made the subject of a reconstruction after the fashion of Eymund and his contemporaries, albeit with newer digital technology developed by a team at the University of Dundee’s Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification (Figure 9).

The nature of the evidence available (the skeleton was found in an isolated burial, aligned east-west and without any grave goods) meant that the resulting interpretation was almost wholly reliant on the woman’s physical characteristics, insofar as they could be derived from an osteoarchaeological analysis of her bones, the results of which are summarised in the current *JORVIK Companion Guide*:



Figure 10: Eymund the fisherman from JORVIK #4, 2017 (YAT Archive)

Recent pathological analysis has revealed a range of defects in the hips, legs, spine, ribs, shoulders, knee, hand and wrist, painting a picture of a small, middle-aged woman with a pronounced limp, reliant on a crutch due to a [...] problem with her right hip. (JORVIK Companion Guide 2017: 44)

The images developed at Dundee were incorporated into an animated display in *Investigate Coppergate*, which reconstructed the Coppergate Woman as she might have looked in life, complete with period clothing and crutch. Not since Eymund twenty years before had any individual from the archaeology of the Viking-period city been given such prominence in JORVIK's permanent displays. The same skeleton, along with two others, is currently on display once again at JORVIK: now visitors can manipulate a model produced by the local hospital's CT scanner to examine the Coppergate Woman's remains in minute detail via a touchscreen.

The scientist and TV presenter Alice Roberts provided the new commentary for the JORVIK ride (Script for JORVIK #3 2010), in which she broke off from her narration at five points in the journey to speak in Old Norse directly to a number of the characters on the set, who responded in kind. Names were given to Sigurd the antlerworker and Unni the woodturner. As in the previous version of JORVIK, the dialogue in the ambient soundtrack was sparse. The biggest change on the set was the introduction of seven new animatronic figures, more lifelike and sophisticated than those that had preceded them. While their facial features were based on those of the mannequins they replaced, the new models by LifeFormations of Ohio had lips that moved and eyes that turned and blinked, as well as a greater range of movement in their limbs.



Figure 11: The Coppergate Woman from JORVIK #4, 2017 (YAT Archive)

JORVIK #4: 2017

Late 2015 saw the near-total destruction of the JORVIK set by the floodwaters of the River Foss. The gallery spaces were also affected, meaning that a programme of recovery, cleaning and redevelopment for the whole site was needed within a 16-month closure period (York Archaeological Trust 2017: 7–12). As well as the insurance settlement, JORVIK's *Campaign Canute* fundraising effort helped to finance the rebuild (York Archaeological Trust 2016: 11). Although distressing, the flood presented an opportunity for improving JORVIK's visitor facilities and interpretative offer on a scale not seen since 2001.

The long-awaited final report on the archaeology of the Viking levels at Coppergate, which had appeared in print in 2014, contained a wealth of new information and served as a handbook for the reinterpretation of the site (Hall *et al.* 2014), but as in the previous refurbishments the designers also drew on the latest research and advice from members of the local archaeological and academic communities to inform their approach. To this end, a 'research themes' meeting between representatives of YAT and specialists from the British Museum, the Yorkshire Museum and the archaeology or history departments at York, Leeds and Sheffield universities in April 2016 sought to identify a number of priority areas to address in a 're-imagining' of JORVIK. As well as emphasising concepts that had been present to a greater or lesser degree in the previous iterations (urbanism, cultural and linguistic differences amongst the city's Viking-period populace etc.), the discussion led to the introduction of a number of novel themes, all to be embodied by the Vikings that visitors would see in the course of their visit. Chief amongst these were York's links with the Irish Sea region; infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age; disabilities; religious beliefs; slavery; and differences in outward appearance to express ethnic heterogeneity within York's population. The latter theme was given added impetus by a recent report commissioned by YAT on burials from the early medieval cemetery associated with St Benet's, York, which had found that one of the adult male skeletons (on display at JORVIK with its coffin since the refurbishment, along with the remains of the Coppergate Woman and another female skeleton from St Benet's) may be that of an individual of African heritage, possibly a migrant to York or a Viking-period descendant of settlers of African or mixed ancestry (Keefe and Holst 2015).

Twenty-two new animatronic figures by LifeFormations were commissioned, along with a sculpture in the likeness of a JORVIK competition winner kneeling next to a hearth in a Coppergate house interior. In the case of Eymund, LifeFormations based the face of his replacement on the reconstruction that had originated in the 1990s (Figure 10).

Switching the dateline from 975 to 960 (Script for JORVIK #4 2017), the commentary (voiced by the actor Richard Hawley) establishes at an early point that visitors are arriving in a 'multicultural' environment:

It was a busy place with people arriving from all over the Viking world to visit, trade and settle. In this multicultural society, people had different appearances, languages, religions and possessions.

The dialogue to be heard is once again limited to short utterances, but now there is greater variety in the languages spoken. As well as Old Norse and Old English, Old Irish and Middle Welsh feature. There is an Arab trader who complains to himself in his native tongue. His costly silk garments distinguish him from the other inhabitants of Coppergate; others are marked out by their tattoos or filed teeth. Children of various ages appear throughout, including a son for Grummi the blacksmith. The two are shown sitting outside Grummi's house, the son learning aspects of his father's trade; it is a picture that encapsulates the idea of children at work, where previously they have been shown only at play. Two of the animatronic figures are visibly disabled; Mord the leatherworker has Dupuytren's Contracture, which has caused his fingers to become clawed. The Coppergate Woman, named in the children's commentary by Toki as 'Leoba', is represented on the set in animatronic form, using her crutch and struggling to cross Coppergate (Figure 11).

A priest, who gives the last rites in Latin, is ministering to a dying woman inside one of the houses. Setting the scene, the commentary explains:

The first Vikings who came here were not Christians and worshipped their pagan Norse gods, but they seem to have adopted Christianity quite quickly.

The figure of a woman with hands bound, being coerced by a well-dressed man into leaving his ship, conveys the concept of slavery, the first ever overt reference to enslaved people to feature on the JORVIK set. She calls for help in Old Irish. As the commentary explains:

Slavers may have come to Jorvik from Dublin or elsewhere, bringing with them the spoils of their raids or battle victories. Slaves were an important part of society all over northern and western Europe at this time.

On board the same ship is a new post for JORVIK staff: for the first time, costumed interactive team members are integrated into the landscape of the JORVIK set. They carry out a range of Viking-period activities and converse with each other in Old Norse or Old English, adding movement, variety and texture to the ride experience. The final vignette encountered in the ride includes elements of fantasy; the capsule passes through a house interior in which a man sits cross-legged by a hearth and recounts part of the *Poetic Edda* in Old Norse. Special visual effects create a scene in which the gods and monsters of Ragnarök form in the sparks that rise from the fire.

Discussion

JORVIK's first year of operation in the post-flood period was a commercial success, but where do its Vikings now stand in relation to their predecessors, current museological practice, and critical thinking and scholarship on public archaeology and its interpretation? Even before the flood, the 21st-century rise of the academic discipline of Public History and a concomitant interest in popular medievalisms had reignited scholarly interest in JORVIK, whose profile is so unusual amongst museums and heritage sites in the UK: this is attested by the increasing numbers of enquiries from researchers fielded by the JORVIK team, many of which find their way into my inbox. These tend to fall into two camps: those that are concerned with representations of Viking identity, and those that are to do with immersive heritage experiences and the affective responses they elicit (see for instance the EU-funded CoHERE and EMOTIVE projects, both of which have collaborated with JORVIK, as just two of the more prominent examples of active research in these areas: CoHERE 2018, EMOTIVE 2018). Often there is a degree of overlap between the two, with JORVIK's Vikings a natural point of connection.

Although as yet there has been little published about JORVIK #4, I hope to provide some topics for consideration in this brief discussion. Some of these echo the debates of the past, and some are tied to discussions in the wider field of heritage studies in the 21st century, where JORVIK has much to contribute because of its unique history and design.

An overwhelmingly positive review by Caroline MacDonald appeared in the *Museums Journal* shortly after the reopening. MacDonald noted:

It is pleasing to see the archaeological evidence for far-traded goods and travel transformed into ethnically diverse faces among the crowd. Similarly, a Christian priest is reflective of the shift in religious beliefs. [...] it's clear that effort has been made to include more women and children. (MacDonald 2017)

MacDonald is troubled, however, by the vignette of the slaver and his captive:

The sight of a slave trader at work provides a darker glimpse of Jorvik but it is disappointing that an enslaved girl [...] is the first woman we meet on our journey. (MacDonald 2017)



Figure 12: JORVIK branding, 2017 (YAT Archive)

MacDonald's criticism chimes with the feminist critiques of JORVIK from the '80s and '90s: the issue at stake for her is that of the representation of women in a 21st-century attraction. Although direct archaeological evidence for slaves in Viking York is lacking, the unfree formed a whole stratum of Viking society that had gone unrepresented at JORVIK until 2017. In the absence of archaeological material to inform the representation of a slave, the historical *Annals of Ulster* were mined instead: the entry for 821 states in bald terms that women were targeted in a large-scale slave-taking raid on Howth in Dublin Bay. The slave at JORVIK, therefore, expresses as a visual metaphor two of the concepts identified in the research themes meeting as key to representing a living Viking-period landscape for York: slavery, and connections with the Irish Sea region. Like all of JORVIK's Viking mannequins she is freighted with meaning, embodying complex notions and associations in figures that are only glimpsed in passing from the time capsule. The affective import of the museum-diorama-with-mannequins is described with reference to another Viking exhibition, Moesgard Museum's *7 Vikings*, by Howard Williams:

...their uncanny resemblances to living persons can create powerful imaginative and educational connections between visitors and past individuals and the societies they represent within the museum context. (Williams 2016: 294)

Given the potential for creating impact of this sort, how should 'difficult' aspects of Viking history be embodied and presented to diverse audiences in this setting, without seeming to normalise or even celebrate them? Is the obligation of the Viking museum to confront the difficult at the risk of reinforcing it, or to accentuate the good at the risk of whitewashing aspects of Viking history that are unpalatable by today's standards (given that the potential for discussion and contextualisation in either approach is necessarily limited by the format of the visit)? Difficult histories at museum and heritage sites are increasingly under the spotlight; the focus has tended not to be on sites that deal with the remote past, although many of the quandaries facing museum designers and operators are undoubtedly the same.

JORVIK's dilemma is only mitigated to a degree by insisting on objectivity and a strictly evidence-based approach in the interests of accuracy and impartiality. Everything presented on the set at JORVIK, although grounded in historical and archaeological evidence of one sort or another (and the archaeology of Coppergate in particular), is there as a result of choices: the things that the designers and operators have chosen to exhibit or amplify, and the things they have chosen to discard or minimise, plus the creative choices they have made to fill the gaps in the evidence, all within a framework of their own value judgements and biases. A certain lack of transparency around these choices at JORVIK is nothing new, having been succinctly described by Stephen Driscoll in 1988:

...once one begins to reconstruct a society in such detail and draw upon social theory choices must be made about how to treat topics like gender, ethnicity, work and leisure. Conscious or not, such decisions are made. The key thing to note is that while the display effectively gives the visitor the impression of having come face to face with the past, nowhere is it acknowledged that such decisions have taken place. (Driscoll 1988: 9)

The constraints of interpretative models that cannot float free of their own cultural milieux, however, can promote useful debate, especially around histories that are 'difficult' by dint of their present-day resonances: JORVIK is as much a mirror of the present as a window into the past, and the slavery scene playing out under the noses of living interactive staff members, heedlessly engaged in everyday tasks in their position on board the ship, says as much about the banality of violence against women in the 21st century as it does about the 10th. At both ends of the Viking spectrum, the warrior-superman and the female victim/drudge/slave embody aspects of a problematic popular brand co-opted by JORVIK in the 1980s. Neither model has yet been fully forsaken, although the current branding relegates the heavily armed warrior to a secondary position behind a more ambiguous Viking male, alongside a Viking woman (Figure 12).

JORVIK's continued success, however, is attributable to more than the mere appropriation and promulgation of stereotypes. JORVIK has on occasion been criticised for compromising the popular image of the warlike, seafaring Viking by its insistence on representing more settled, peaceable aspects of Viking-period life. Service (1998: 192–193) cites the example of the 1995 BBC documentary *Timewatch: Evidence of Vikings*, whose narrator calls JORVIK 'a Viking centre without, when you come down to it, much sign of the Vikings' and opines that 'the new Viking is a decent, respectable migrant, and quite frankly, a little dull'.

In some respects, JORVIK's original approach to interpreting archaeological evidence anticipated later arguments by Ruth Tringham and Catherine Chang in favour of 'humanizing' representations of prehistoric structures, in spite of the inescapable cultural and historical specificity of the archaeologist as a mediator in graphic representations of the past (Tringham and Chang 1991: 12–14). Tringham and Chang argue for the reclamation of the domestic sphere (both at household level and as it extends

into a wider landscape of neighbouring buildings, rubbish pits, and countryside beyond) as one of the principal stages on which human history has been enacted. Few heritage sites attempt to achieve this as completely as JORVIK. Its kitchen-sink-drama underpinnings resonate, too, with 21st-century approaches to interpretation that valorise a 'soap opera style' and character depth to elicit useful affective responses in visitors, where emotive storytelling plays a vital role in 'encouraging repeat visits, facilitating direct and ongoing interaction and deepening knowledge transfer' (EMOTIVE 2018).

Storytelling, drama and fantasy serve another purpose in JORVIK #4 too, one that has gone unremarked but that signals a significant change in emphasis since the advent of the 'realistic photographic detail' described by Shanks and Tilley. The 'on-stage' presence of interactive staff (who may be encountered subsequently in the artefacts gallery speaking in modern English) amongst the mannequins on the JORVIK set is a reminder that JORVIK is a performance as much as it is a simulacrum: a fresh rebuttal to claims that JORVIK is without transparency in this regard, and one that may be understood instinctively by all of its visitors, irrespective of their awareness of archaeological theory.

A fuller account of JORVIK's contribution to the iconography and narratives of popular accounts of the Viking world would need to include many additional layers of interpretation and presentation: 40 years of guidebooks, learning packs, school workshops, event programmes, community art projects, advertisements, retail items and so on. Its influence on its many imitators, school textbooks, literary fiction and elsewhere, although usefully surveyed by Alexandra Service in 1998, is overdue a reassessment, and not only with regard to its Vikings: JORVIK's imaginative reconstruction of an early medieval society, inspired by archaeological research and delivered to its public in an immersive environment, remains unique in its execution and impact.

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Displaying the Dark Ages in Museums

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How museums and heritage sites in England display the early medieval past is the focus of academic and public interest and debate. Despite ever-pressured budgets and limited resources, the stories told about the early medieval past in these environments are of key importance for the story of this island, and have become increasingly important in the context of political and cultural crises of English identity, and extremist appropriations of the Early Middle Ages. Reviewing current and past displays of early medieval material culture at the Museum of Liverpool, the World Museum (also in Liverpool), and Chester's Grosvenor Museum, this chapter evaluates the Early Middle Ages in city museums serving multicultural regions in the English North West and West Midlands. Consequently, we identify recommendations for potential future museum engagement with the 'Dark Ages'.

Introduction: The Early Middle Ages in English Museums

How should we display the Early Middle Ages in heritage sites and museums through the 2020s and beyond? Early medieval collections continue to have prominence in exhibitions across England in regional, county, town and city museums, including the Norwich Castle Museum, Salisbury Museum, the Corinium Museum in Cirencester, the Museum of London, and the Weston Park Museum in Sheffield. On a national level, the British Museum in London curates a diverse but significant gallery dedicated to the Early Middle Ages from across Europe, including the finds from the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 ship burial and the Cuerdale Hoard (Marzinzik 2011). In addition, there are also dedicated displays and museum dimensions at heritage sites, most notably West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village (Suffolk), the Sutton Hoo National Trust site (also Suffolk) (see Marzinzik 2011: 1029-1033; Walsh and Williams 2019), the JORVIK Viking Centre in York (Tuckley this volume), Jarrow Hall, Jarrow, (County Durham) (formerly Bede's World), Lindisfarne Priory English Heritage site (Northumberland) and Tintagel (Cornwall) (see Greaney this volume). Yet there are also remarkable new exhibitions which encourage a review of how the early medieval period features in English museums. Notably, the treasures of a late 6th-century chamber grave known as the 'Prittlewell Prince' went on display at Southend Central Museum in May 2019 (Iqbal 2019), coinciding with the final publication of both a detailed academic monograph (Blackmore *et al.* 2019), a popular book (Hirst and Scull 2019), and a Museum of London press release calling it 'Britain's Tutankhamun' (e.g. Brown 2019). The year 2019 witnessed other fresh early medieval exhibitions. The redisplay of The Staffordshire Hoard at The Potteries Museum resulted in The Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Mercia gallery. This marked both the tenth anniversary of the Hoards discovery, coinciding also with its full academic publication (Fern *et al.* 2019). Likewise, 2019 saw the refurbishment of the National Trust site of Sutton Hoo (Hilts 2019).

Individually and collectively, UK early medieval exhibitions attract large numbers of visitors. Surprisingly, however, they have conjured limited academic or public debate. Internationally, this situation is changing since particular museums have experienced heated controversies surrounding early medieval exhibitions. Notable recent instances include the debates surrounding the decision not to include human remains in the *Vikings: Beyond the Legend* touring exhibition at Melbourne Museum, Australia (Paul 2018). Similarly, the imaginative and anachronistic portrayals of early medieval people in the portraits of re-enactors and others incorporated into the *Meet the Vikings* exhibition at the National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark has caused uproar in the press and among academics (Sindbæk 2019; see also Pentz *et al.* 2019). Comparable controversies have yet to embroil early medieval displays in the UK, with the notable exception of the redisplay of Tintagel by English Heritage (see Greaney this volume). Still, this



Figure 1: Views of the Museum of Liverpool early medieval display in 2015 (above: with the Huxley Hoard temporarily on loan elsewhere) and 2012 (below). (Photographs: Howard Williams)

current climate of academic and public debate prompts us whether a systematic comparative evaluation of early medieval museum displays in England and beyond is necessary. It also raises important questions with regard to why and how we should display England's early medieval past in museums and heritage sites. To date, there has been only scant literature tackling the specific challenges faced when displaying early medieval collections, including artefacts, artworks (encompassing stone sculpture), and human remains, in museums and heritage sites. Previous work has identified the widespread perpetuation of out-dated research regarding ethnicity and gender roles in particular, and processes of migration, kingdom formation and Christian conversion more broadly (Lucy and Herring 1999; Marzinzik 2011; McCombe 2011a and b; Williams 2009; Walsh and Williams 2019). Yet, key questions need to be answered in the present context. How and to what extent will these splendid artefacts engage visitors and tell fresh stories about the Early Middle Ages for early 21st-century audiences? Can such finds revitalise and engage local communities in their past as well as drawing in visitors and boost local economies and senses of belonging? Can they tackle fantastastical visions and extremist misuses of the Early Middle Ages with data-rich narratives (Marzinzik 2011: 1039)?

For this short contribution (which is admittedly restricted by being the result of the observations and reflections of the authors guided by input from the curators rather than a more rigorous survey visitors which future work might readily pursue), we aim to tackle these questions using the Grosvenor Museum, Chester and World Museum and Museum of Liverpool (both parts of National Museums Liverpool) as case studies. The region in question is not renowned for its rich early medieval finds, but is key to the story of Britain and Ireland. Furthermore, the region has produced striking finds of hoards, settlements and stone sculpture which together shed light on the early medieval kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria and their relationships and connections with North Wales and, from the 9th century, the influence of Hiberno-Norse Irish Sea contacts and the expanding power of Wessex (Griffiths 2010). These museums thus house significant early medieval collections but have faced challenges regarding their display and the character of their interpretation. For Liverpool, there is also the fascinating case of Bryan Faussett's collection of early Anglo-Saxon grave-finds from cemeteries mainly in east Kent being donated to the museum by Joseph Meyer (Southworth 1990). Taken together, they reveal broader themes pertaining to the multiple challenges of conveying the complex stories about the c. 650 years between the end of Roman Britain and the Norman Conquest, and the relative neglect of the Early Middle Ages in comparison with other periods and themes. In this regard, museums unwittingly run the risk of perpetuating stereotypes regarding the early medieval past as a 'Dark Age'.

Indeed, the absence of significant early medieval collections reveals the still prevalent preference for the ancient world – Egyptian, Greek and Roman – and perhaps also a curatorial and popular ambivalence towards the key formative historical phases of the early medieval period and its impact on modern Britain's nations and peoples. We conclude by discussing the increasingly problematic nature of this situation in the face of ongoing intense political and cultural debate regarding the nature of England's early medieval and modern identities complex network of relationships with the rest of these islands (Ireland, Man, Cornwall, Wales and Scotland as well as Continental Europe and beyond), as well as the status of museums as inheritors of colonial legacies.

The Museum of Liverpool

In 2006, the Museum of Liverpool Life closed while the Museum of Liverpool was being developed with the target for opening in 2011. Meanwhile, the Curator of British Archaeology at the World Museum was planning to retire and the decision was taken to transfer the Regional Archaeology Collection and the curatorial post (appointed in 2007) to the Museum of Liverpool (Liz Stewart pers. comm.). The archaeology team who undertook research and commercial excavation at that time were also transferred from the World Museum to the Museum of Liverpool division and started to contribute

towards the development of content for the new museum. The archaeology collections at National Museums Liverpool (NML) were split along geographic lines; collections relating to Merseyside and the region were placed in the Museum of Liverpool collection, while collections from further afield in Britain and abroad remained in the World Museum collection.

At the time of writing, the Museum of Liverpool has a curatorial team of five archaeologists (4.2 full-time equivalent) who look after the Regional Archaeology Collection (around 100,000 objects from the Mesolithic to the modern period), as well as working on engagement and leading community archaeology projects. Since 2011, early medieval finds from the region are integrated into the long-term display as part of the timeline of the region's history - 'History Detectives', described on the museums website as 'the backbone of the gallery'¹. Situated on the first floor, the chronology runs from prehistory through the medieval period to the present day. A single large display case is dedicated to the Early Middle Ages. The museum attracts c. 750,000 visitors per year and the early medieval gallery is incorporated into several school sessions, including 'Little Diggers' sessions for under 6 year-olds, and for Key Stage 2 (7–11 year olds) sessions (Liz Stewart pers. comm.).

The first point of note is the interface with the adjoining Roman display. Five pins dating to the 9th or 10th centuries AD found in nearby Meols feature alongside Iron Age, Roman and later medieval finds in order to illustrate the *longue durée* of activity at this particular site. Secondly, moving into the 'early medieval' display case (Figure 1), the first cabinet encountered contains the skull and associated facial reconstruction of 'Merseyside's oldest skeleton' from Leasowe, dating to the Roman period and thus a spill-over from the adjacent Roman display. Given questions over the precise dating and character of the end of Roman rule in the North West, perhaps it is an astute decision to break down traditional periodisations by placing this with the early medieval displays.

Under the Leasowe remains, we move into the Early Middle Ages with a replica (derived from a laser scan of the original) of the 'Aethelmund Stone' from Overchurch, Wirral, described as the 'earliest runic inscription from the region' and dated to the 9th century. It 'asks for Christians to "pray for Aethelmund"', probably an important local landowner or priest' (see also Bailey 2010: 91–94). To the right of the Leasowe and Overchurch display is a flat-screen television playing a video about the archaeology of the region which again focuses on the long-lived coastal site of Meols.

The central panel in the display case is structured chronologically, from left to right. At the top is a bare listing of historical events that defines what little we know regarding the region's early medieval history, starting with '605AD Anglo Saxons [sic] and Welsh battle near Chester for control of lands in the region' and culminating in '902 AD Viking leader Hingamund is expelled from Dublin and given lands near Chester'. These two dates are replicated in larger print as part of the green timeline linking together the prehistoric, Roman and later displays. For the early medieval cabinet it bears two dates that frame the contents of display: '605 AD and 902 AD'. These mark the supposed dates of the Battle of Chester between the Northumbrians and the Welsh, and Ingimund's settlement of the Dublin Norse. To complement these local events, along the bottom of the central panel there is a timeline outlining key events from outside the region and from elsewhere in the Old World, beginning with '610 AD Prophet Muhammed receives his first revelation'; 'about 730 AD Printing is invented in China', and ending with '1066 AD Battle of Hastings' and '1088 AD First university is founded in Bologna, Italy'.

The text panels upon the central timeline explain variously; the long-term survival of Brythonic speakers in the region until the 8th century if not beyond (titled with the question: 'Welsh-speakers?'), the complex borderland conflicts between Mercia and Northumbria ('Battle for Control'), the linguistic mixture revealed by place-names from the region supported by a distribution map of Norse place-names ('Ancient Place Names'), the history of runes using the Aethelmund stone as the example, supported

¹ <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/visit/galleries/history/>

by a photograph of 29 characters inscribed on face A ('Runes'), a discussion of the importance of silver for the Viking-period economy in the Irish Sea as revealed by the Cuerdale and Huxley hoards ('Viking treasure': supported by a photograph of the former hoard alongside the actual Huxley hoard), and finally early medieval stone sculpture from the region ('Viking sculpture': accompanied by photographs of the fragments of stone sculpture from Neston 1A and 2A (Bailey 2010: 85–87) and West Kirby 6 (Bailey 2010: 145). Regarding the latter, the text states that its motifs 'borrow from both pagan and Christian beliefs', that they were originally brightly painted, and were created by 'Vikings' who 'created similar monuments in their settlements around the Irish Sea, including on the Isle of Man, and in Wales, Cumbria and Ireland'.

Set above the long, thin timeline are two further panels, one on the left introducing the 'Anglo-Saxons', the other to the right addressing 'Viking Merseyside'. Between these, and the centrepiece of the exhibition is a replica of one side, face A, of the West Kirby 4 'Viking 'hogback' tombstone: found in 1869, the original can be seen inside St Bridget's church, West Kirby (Bailey 2010: 135–136; see also Williams 2016).² This is juxtaposed against the replica Viking hall at Trelleborg, Denmark to set up the argument for this type of monument was the result of Scandinavian influence and, in particular, the stone's hall-like character, linked regionally by the curved wall of a house excavated at Irby (Philpott 2015). Below this, the early 10th-century Huxley silver hoard is displayed (Graham-Campbell and Philpott 2009). Illustrating the trading and settling character of the Norse inhabitants of the Irish Sea region, to the right of the hogback replica is a mannequin of a blonde-haired man with a red tunic and blue cloak fixed with a penannular brooch and holding folding scales as found in 10th-century furnished inhumation graves in northern Britain and Ireland, although this display links to the Meols beach market site and emphasises the trading dimensions of the Hiberno-Norse connections in the region (Griffiths *et al.* 2007: 70, 402; Liz Stewart pers. comm.). Behind the mannequin is a photograph of two replica Viking longships on water and a photograph of a circle-headed cross and shaft, Bromborough 1a–b, another local artefact (Bailey 2010: 52–53).

Densely packed, the display attempts a near-impossible task given the limited space afforded to it. Still, it does effectively showcase many of the iconic artefacts and monuments from the Merseyside region: the replica Overchurch 1 and West Kirby 4 carved stone monuments and the actual Huxley Hoard. With brief text-panels, a video, a time-line format, and supporting photographs of actual and replica artefacts, the display addresses some of the ambiguity regarding the Roman/medieval transition, trade and communications around the Irish Sea, conflict and colonisation, and the theme of Christian conversion and religious organisation. The Museum of Liverpool therefore tackles, albeit briefly, the complex evolving frontier dimensions of the region, a zone of interactions between the Welsh kingdoms and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria during the 7th–9th centuries AD with other regions around the Irish Sea. It then introduces the region's incorporation into the wider Viking world of the 9th–11th centuries AD. Notably, given that the Museum of Liverpool is, by its nature, geographically specific, it would not be the relevant place to display the Faussett collection of Anglo-Saxon antiquarian finds from Kent, gifted by Joseph Mayer to the city in 1867 (Southworth 1990). Still, nested scales and temporalities are incorporated into this small display and there is considerable text despite the necessary restrictions on detail instituted by the need to limit word-lengths. As such, it constitutes the only museum in Cheshire and Merseyside to prominently feature the Early Middle Ages within a permanent display. Moreover, the display fits with the ethos that extends across the Museum of showing archaeological evidence from the locality and to meet the needs of primary school visits from across Merseyside, Cheshire and Lancashire (Liz Stewart pers. comm.).

Liverpool's World Museum

In contrast, the World Museum has no permanent display of its early medieval collections. Notably, the Faussett collection composed of 18th-century grave-finds from Kentish Anglo-Saxon furnished

² <http://www.westkirbymuseum.co.uk/>

inhumation graves of the 6th and 7th centuries AD and gifted by Joseph Mayer to Liverpool Museum in 1867 is not displayed. Until relatively recently, there had been a significant, if small, display of early Anglo-Saxon weapons, dress accessories and implements from the Faussett collection adjacent to the larger Greco-Roman and Egyptian galleries and thus part of its Ancient World Gallery (McCombe 2011b). However, since April 2017 when the new Egyptian gallery expanded in scale, this was removed (Partheni pers. comm.). The principal exception is the most famous artefact from this collection and the former centrepiece of the Anglo-Saxon display: the 7th-century Kentish composite disc brooch of gold, garnet and shell known as the Kingston Brooch. The funerary context and significance of the Kingston Brooch is emphasised by an artistic reconstruction of the female-gendered grave-assemblage 205 from



Figure 2: The Kingston Down brooch on display in the Weston Discovery Centre, the World Museum (Photograph: Howard Williams)

Kingston Down from whence it came (see also Williams 2009). This is on display in the Weston Discovery Centre at World Museum (Figure 2), but here it lacks any significant context given the absence of other early medieval artefacts or indeed interpretative information about the Early Middle Ages more broadly.

Since the 19th century, the Faussett collection has long been perceived as out of place in Liverpool and has never been displayed in the context of Britain's story (Hawkes 1990; Rhodes 1990; McCombe 2011a and b). Indeed, Southworth's (1990) aspiration to incorporate the British material into permanent display has clearly been forestalled. However, there remains the potential in multi-period and themed temporary displays to incorporate elements of the Faussett collection. Indeed, throughout all the National Museums Liverpool venues, the curatorial staff are looking to change temporary exhibitions and elements of long-term displays frequently, with the plan for Museum of Liverpool regularly revaluated and flexibility offered to swap in new content when resources are available. Furthermore, across NML they are increasingly looking to provide access to collections online and also to support touring exhibitions and loans, as well as through direct engagement by visits to the venues. Certainly, the digital future of the collection, with free access to all, is one viable route. In this regard though, warning must be given that the digital project to create a searchable online database for the Faussett Collection is currently stalled, and only two spreadsheets list the graves and the artefacts, with no illustrations and minimal descriptions (see Sutcliffe 2007).³ Still, the potential exists to enrich such a database with high-quality images and detailed information online. Indeed, the NML are currently redesigning their website and the new collections pages will enable more images and multiple interpretations of individual objects, which will increase opportunity for interpretation. The enhancing of this information online is only going to be limited by staff resources and time.

In summary, there is no doubt that the scale and quality of the Faussett collection, the primary early medieval collection, is deserving of display either physically and/or digitally on a far larger scale than at present. While from a parochial perspective, Kentish grave-finds might seem incongruous in the context of a multicultural northern English city, the material is not only of national and international importance in itself, it can readily be deployed to speak to the far-flung connections of the Anglo-Saxon world with western and northern Britain and Ireland, as well as with Continental Europe and beyond: something emphasised repeatedly in the exhibition of the Staffordshire Hoard at the Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent museum sites. Indeed, there is the potential to do something other than promote the collection as 'art' but to critique any misconception of the homogeneity of 'Anglo-Saxon culture'. Hence, there is no need, in the context of a multicultural city, to promote a narrow 'story of England' which focuses primarily on the collapse of Rome through to the Norman Conquest and incorporating an emphasis on migrations, kingdom formation, Christian conversion and the transformations of the Viking Age in a fashion long rehearsed in other museums. Indeed, the Faussett Collection might have failed in even these aspects since its gift in the 19th century (see Lucy and Herring 1999; McCombe 2011a and b). Instead, the Kentish artefacts might be readily deployed to address fresh themes and narratives, both in terms of the history of collecting and how they were acquired by museums in the first place, but also new approaches to early medieval material culture and mortuary practices, including the roles of items in negotiating and transformation social identities and both local, regional and international connections. Notably, linking life and death in the centuries following the fall of the Roman province of Britannia, the collection could serve to highlight ongoing Continental connections, social complexity and diversity, and form the focal point for broader geographic and temporal narratives for southern and eastern Britain in the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries AD. Indeed, such a re-display of British-derived antiquities might serve to effectively address concerns regarding the de-colonisation of Britain's museums, especially for NML which has divided the regional story from wider global narratives into different museums. Themes like daily life, faith and religious organisation, craft activities and trade, dialogues with the dead, diaspora and slavery are as pertinent to other collections as they would be to the Faussett material.

³ <http://inventorium.arch.ox.ac.uk/>; https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/novum_ahrc_2009/

Chester's Grosvenor Museum

Similar to the World Museum, Chester's Grosvenor Museum has extensive collections of early medieval artefacts from the city and its immediate environs, particularly dating to the Viking period (Royles pers. comm.). Until recent times, the room on the left of the entrance was dedicated to finds from the city and included a display about 'Dark Age' Chester. However, none of this is now on permanent display and the focus of the archaeology display remains firmly on the Roman period. Indeed, the Roman artefacts take up two galleries at the museum, one telling the story of life in Roman Chester, the other houses a collection of Roman tombstones which is of international importance.⁴ The wider emphasis throughout Chester on the Roman period is perhaps justification for this focus, but the museum's other significant gallery is the Ridgeway Silver Gallery, which displays silverware from Chester's period as an important manufacturer and hallmarker. Hence, the museum shifts from the Roman period to the 18th century with little information regarding the intervening periods, including the Early Middle Ages, as permanent displays.

Temporary displays have, in the past, included early medieval finds. The 2009/10 temporary 'Reap and Tillage: the Vikings in Cheshire' exhibition featured the story of the Vikings in the region around Chester as well as the city. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, this exhibition aimed to show the diversity of ways in which Norse settlers and contacts influenced the region in the 10th and early 11th centuries AD. The exhibition featured the Huxley Hoard (Green 2013), the West Kirby hogback and the Aethelmund stone, and a painted replica of an early medieval stone from Neston (see Sassin this volume).

Currently, Anglo-Saxon coins appear in the Roman tombstones gallery in a display focusing on monetary history. More prominently, the *Dead Normal* temporary exhibition running from October 2018 to April 2019 explored the history of death through a rich range of art, artefacts, monuments and also human remains, engaging with themes of dying, death, burial, mourning, and commemoration. The exhibition included local Bronze Age artefacts, Ubshabtis from ancient Egypt, which were on loan from the University of Liverpool's Garstang Museum, lead grave-goods from a later medieval priest's grave from ongoing excavations at Poulton, near Chester, and a late medieval grave-slab excavated from the former Chester Police headquarters site as well as a range of post-medieval funerary items (Williams 2018). In addition, prominently positioned within the exhibition were three early medieval exhibits.

First, the 1930–1931 excavations at the Roman roadside settlement south of Chester at Heronbridge revealed a near-unique instance of the victims of early medieval conflict, purportedly linked to the conflict between King Aethelfrith of Northumbria and his Welsh and Mercian rivals c. AD 614–15 (Mason 2007; Tolley 2016). This individual skeleton bears evidence of multiple sharp-force traumas to the skull, suggesting a brutal, violent fate. Whether a monk or warrior, set into the floor of the exhibition in a false grave, the bones shed light on death in the martial kingdoms of the Early Middle Ages in a striking and memorable form.

Found as part of a broader collection of antiquarian discoveries from Meols (Griffiths 2010), the bent arrowhead (or is it a lancehead?), spearhead, axehead and shield boss might constitute elements of one or more furnished early medieval graves. Such a group might indicate a 'Viking' (i.e. Scandinavian-style) furnished inhumation grave, associated with a long understood beach market site on the tip of the Wirral peninsula. The display is accompanied by a card which signposts the burial as Pagan and explains a little of the belief system of the Vikings which led to the incorporation of goods into graves, based on an afterlife in Valhalla.

The third early medieval memorial artefact was the actual Overchurch 1 monument, which is replicated and displayed in the Museum of Liverpool (see above). This was combined in a display with a later

⁴ <http://westcheshiremuseums.co.uk/collections/our-collections/roman-archaeology-collection/>



Figure 3: A montage of photographs of early medieval elements of the *Dead Normal* exhibition, October 2018 . Top: three views of the Heronbridge skeleton. Bottom left: artefacts purported to come from a ‘Viking’ burial at Meols. Bottom right: the Aethelmund Stone (Photograph: Howard Williams)

medieval grave-slab fragment and an early 20th-century gravestone. The three share across the centuries a commonality of memorial function as well as lithic medium, but reveal through their proximity the starkly different contexts in which memorialisation has taken place in the history of Chester and its environs.

This exhibition, in our view, successfully linked the early medieval period to the broader story of Chester and its environs, as well as the wider world, allowing for a discussion of the period in its place in the development of modern society. It was innovative and engaging, and further was paired with an exhibition in another gallery of the museum of engravings and other art works, illustrating memorials at various churches throughout Cheshire ('Memento Mori').

Discussion

Significant collections of early medieval stone sculpture can be viewed outside of these museums in Cheshire and Merseyside, most notably at the Charles Dawson Brown Museum and neighbouring St Brigid's church, West Kirby (Bailey 2010: 133–136, 145–146); St Mary and St Helen's church, Neston (Bailey 2010: 85–90; White 2015) and St John's church, Chester (Bailey 2010: 62–69). In the former two, the stone sculpture has been displayed, lit and captioned relatively recently with a clear sense of the significance of the material, but their connection to the broader history of the region is not made clear. In the wider landscape, the early medieval linear earthworks Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke are the principal early medieval monuments one can see in the landscape. However, in their northern stretches, neither come particularly close to the Cheshire/Merseyside area, and nowhere are their heritage interpretations effectively connected to their part in the story of the broader hinterland of the ruined Roman city of Chester. Hence, the museums under scrutiny alone bear the responsibility for telling the stories of the Early Middle Ages for the region. However, in these museums, it is clear that the Early Middle Ages is only permanently and prominently presented in one of the three, and in a relatively condensed narrative. This situation means that, notwithstanding that the collections are loaned to other temporary exhibitions elsewhere (Liz Stewart, pers. comm.), the early medieval past, fundamental to understanding the story of these islands and its far-flung connections, is largely under-represented. Having said that, the Museum of Liverpool does include 'almost everything in the regional archaeology collection which can be firmly dated to the Early Middle Ages', constituting a far higher fraction of the displayed proportions from other periods (Liz Stewart pers. comm.).

The Faussett collection perhaps deserves separate attention and consideration, as the finds come from outside the region. However, we would contend that this incongruity from the local setting might be readily used as an advantage to discuss inter-regional and international connections of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and its complex and diverse material cultures.

Future initiatives that could be offered to remedy this situation and provide richer and more credible visitor experiences might include:

- incorporating the early medieval past more robustly and clearly into permanent exhibitions on their own merits and terms, whether arranged chronologically or otherwise. Such larger displays might involve innovative and up-to-date text and graphics to clearly explain the period and including material from outside of the immediate locality (notably, the Faussett Collection of Anglo-Saxon antiquities). The Manx Museum, Douglas; the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin; Weston Park Museum, Sheffield; and most locally, the aforementioned Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, all provide very different models for how this might be achieved, although none provide a model for how relatively far-flung provenance artefacts might be displayed. Another possibility is a collaboration with national museums to secure loans, or indeed to create partnership galleries with the British Museum, as developed for the

- medieval collections at Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery;⁵
- connecting the early medieval collections to innovative themed temporary displays, as done so effectively for the *Reap and Tillage* and *Dead Normal* exhibitions at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester;
- creating a North West digital early medieval museum, which would curate richer online resources for educational and research purposes regarding the early medieval past. These could be valuably utilised in dispelling popular notions regarding the moribund nature of the period and popular disengagement from it;⁶
- linking the museums to heritage trails incorporating early medieval urban topographies and rural settlements revealed by place-names and archaeological evidence as well as the aforementioned displays of early medieval stone sculpture at Bromborough, West Kirby, Neston, St John's Chester and elsewhere. A range of heritage trail initiatives have grown for Chester and Merseyside, but only the recent initiative of *The Viking Age in the North West* app for mobile phones for the Viking period led by Dr Clare Downham reveals the potential of this approach more broadly.⁷

The *Dead Normal* exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum serves to highlight how the early medieval period can be successfully displayed as part of a much wider debate about global issues today. However, this appears to be exceptional in Chester and Merseyside currently. The exhibition in the Museum of Liverpool tries hard within a limited space to convey something of the importance of the area during the period, and displaying the Huxley hoard in its entirety as a focal point, albeit with little reference to the origin of the wealth represented by the hoard, the reasons for hiding it, or any mention of its importance beyond the field in Huxley in which it was found. This would be pertinent in this period of political uncertainty and growing English nationalism, and the well-established local interest in the Viking heritage of Merseyside (Griffiths and Harding 2015), the hoard, and other early medieval finds in Cheshire and Merseyside could be discussed as part of the global networks of trading and exchange of which it is a small part, and the resultant cultural diversity and understanding that must have arisen from this contact. Museums who do not pursue this approach are missing the opportunity to inform and educate more inclusively and far beyond promoting out-dated stereotypes of the Early Middle Ages.

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⁵ <https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/norwich-castle/castle-keep-transformation/castle-archives/medieval-gallery>.

⁶ For example, the Isle of Man's iMuseum now includes digital images of the island's early medieval carved and sculpted stone monuments: <https://www.imuseum.im/>.

⁷ <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/csd/app-directory/vikings/>. A good example of a regional approach to the early medieval past is the Palace Green temporary exhibition of the Lindisfarne Gospels in 2013: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/news/newsitem/?itemno=14918>

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Where History Meets Legend: Presenting the Early Medieval Archaeology of Tintagel Castle, Cornwall

Susan Greaney

The evocative ruins of Tintagel Castle in Cornwall have a complex and important archaeological story. Particularly significant is the high-status settlement that flourished there in the Early Middle Ages. This early history is entwined with legend, as the place of King Arthur's conception and the setting for the love story of Tristan and Iseult. This chapter describes a recent project by English Heritage to re-present these 'Dark Age' stories at the site, and reviews the criticism, publicity and comment that this provoked. It explores the process and tensions of telling local, regional and international stories at a multi-period heritage site with significant early medieval archaeological remains that has become both a tourist hotspot and a symbol of Cornish identity.

I do like Cornwall. It is still something like King Arthur and Tristan. It has never taken the Anglo-Saxon civilisation, the Anglo-Saxon sort of Christianity. One can feel free here, for that reason – feel the world as it was in that flicker of pre-Christian Celtic civilisation... It is not England. It is bare and dark and elemental, Tristan's land.

D. H. Lawrence, private letter, Zennor: 1916

I believe in King Arthur and I want to believe that I've walked where he walked. We've nothing like this where I come from and nothing the professor says is going to stop me taking away the memories I came for.

American visitor to Tintagel Castle (quoted in Fowler 1992: 50)

Owing in part to the influence of Victorian poets and writers, tourists have flocked to the evocative ruins of 'King Arthur's Castle' at Tintagel since the nineteenth century. The site has a complex and intriguing archaeological story, from high-status post-Roman trading settlement to medieval castle, completely intertwined with famous legends; not only fables of Arthur, but also the lesser known love story of Tristan and Iseult.

This chapter describes a project that sought to present these narratives, both archaeological and legendary, by focusing on an interpretation scheme delivered at Tintagel Castle in Cornwall by English Heritage in 2015–2016. The launch of the second stage of the project in 2016 produced an immediate negative reaction from several quarters, widely covered in the local and national press. This account attempts to set these reactions into their context: debates about Cornish nationalism, heritage tourism, authenticity, identity and ownership of the past. The author's perspective derives from having worked on this project as lead historian and archaeologist from September 2014 until May 2016. It is hoped that setting out the story in full may provide a useful interpretation case study and that lessons can be learned from it for future projects, particularly those tackling the archaeology and heritage interpretation of early medieval sites, monuments and landscapes.

Following an overview of the mixed and rather confusing messages that visitors encountered at Tintagel Castle prior to the delivery of this project, a brief outline of the history and legends of Tintagel Castle is given. There follows a description of what was delivered on site, before the reactions to the project are examined in detail and set into their wider context.

Confusing messages

Approaching the coastal village of Tintagel by car, visitors encounter an enormous portable billboard proclaiming 'Tintagel Castle, 1 mile left at junction, ample parking' and then, in much smaller letters underneath 'food served all day'. This particular 'Tintagel Castle' is a pub, although many no doubt mistake this sign as directions to the English Heritage property of the same name. This misleading sign rather sets the tone for the fun and tacky experience that lies ahead. Continuing along Fore Street, amongst the fudge, ice cream and pasty shops, visitors will spot 'Merlin's Cave' crystal shop, 'Willowmoon' offering tarot readings, a rash of pay and display car parks (including King Arthur's Car Park), gift shops bristling with plastic swords and pubs that include 'King Arthur's Arms' and 'The Crossbow'. Despite the recent loss of 'Pendragon Gifts' (replaced by 'North Shore Gallery'), the visual clues on the approach to the castle remain strongly mystical and Arthurian. Together with the neighbouring villages of Boscastle, where the Museum of Witchcraft is located, St. Nectan's Glen and the Rocky Valley labyrinths near Trevethy, and a 6th-century inscribed stone known as 'King Arthur's Stone', now part of the Arthurian centre at Slaughterbridge, Tintagel is part of a small and distinct region of constructed 'Celtic-Arthuriana' on the North Cornwall coast (Figure 1; Busby and Laviolette 2012; Hale 2004; Orange and Laviolette 2010).

A study of the village of Tintagel from a sociological perspective as an expression of alternative or 'unofficial' heritage attitudes would be interesting in its own right. However, in this context, this brief review serves to make clear that English Heritage does not have a monopoly over how Tintagel Castle and its local setting are presented (and nor should it, of course). Indeed, visitor research in the summer of 2014 found that 66% of visitors to the village were not intending to visit the castle at all, their visit focusing instead on shops, cafes and walks in the local area (BDRC Continental 2014). The nearly 250,000 visitors a year that do enter the guardianship site arrive with a huge variety of prior knowledge and expectations relating to Tintagel Castle, ranging from academic prowess to no prior appreciation beyond the site being branded and marketed as a 'castle' by English Heritage. However, any preconceptions relating to King Arthur may have been heightened by the approach through the village and the wider region. Certainly for many, this is still 'King Arthur's Castle'. Indeed, Orange and Laviolette (2010: 94) found that 'almost all the visitors had a prior association of Tintagel with the legends of King Arthur'. General ideas about the legend of Arthur will derive from many sources: Disney and Hollywood films, BBC dramas, Monty Python, Aubrey Beardsley's woodcuts and the works of T.H. White, Sir Thomas Malory, Bernard Cornwell, alongside many others including school lessons and children's books (Orange and Laviolette 2010: 94), historical and academic accounts.

The site was known as 'King Arthur's Castle' from at least 1650 (Thomas 1988: 39) until January 1931, when the then Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Sir Charles Peers, decided that the name 'Tintagel Castle' was more appropriate (TNA Work 14/859). Although the name might now be seen as excluding the earlier archaeological story of the site by referring only to the 'castle', it usefully differentiates the site from the village of the same name. Prior to this date, the site had been presented to visitors by the stoic and increasingly elderly Florence Nightingale Richards who, like her mother before her, would lead visitors around the various features of the site. These included the romantically named King Arthur's footprint, King Arthur's seat and King Arthur's grave (Thomas 1988: 40). It is difficult to know to what extent these were invented by the Richards family or derive from earlier folklore attached to the site; most are natural features.

When the castle was taken into state guardianship in 1931, a programme of research excavations was immediately instigated with the aim of testing the Arthurian associations of the site and investigating its earlier history. By 1935, when the director of these excavations C.A. Raleigh Radford wrote the official Ministry of Works guidebook, these excavations had revealed the remains of what he thought was an early Christian monastery and he was able to categorically state that 'no evidence has been found to

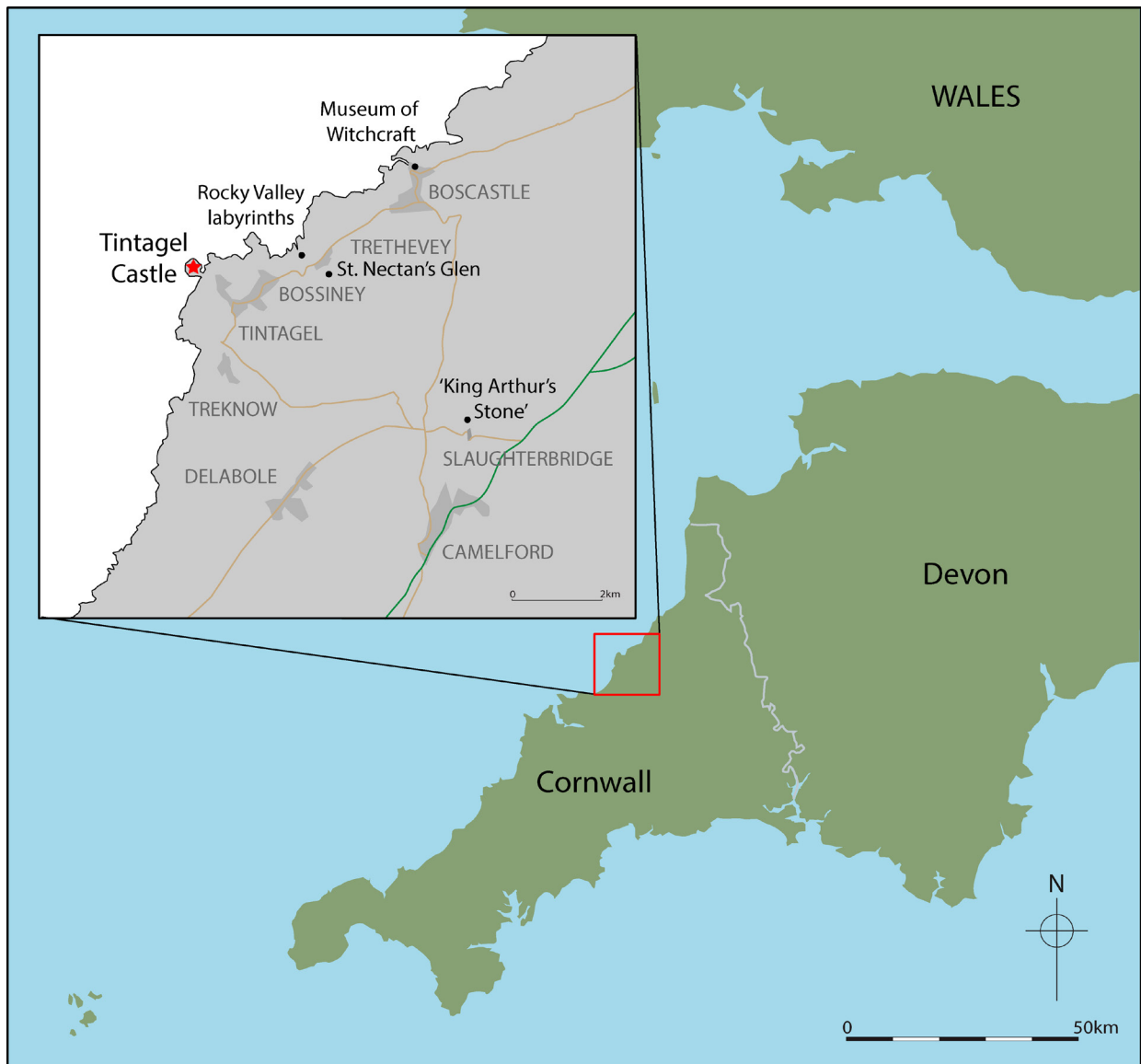


Figure 1: Map of North Cornwall, showing key locations mentioned in the text. Coastline, road and settlement outlines based on Ordnance Survey mapping, Licence number 100024900

support the legendary connection of the Castle with King Arthur' (Raleigh Radford 1935: 6). Radford's work at Tintagel was part of a concerted effort to raise the profile of western Britain during what he saw as the 'Early Christian' period, alongside excavations at sites such as Whithorn, Dumfries and Galloway (Gilchrist 2013). Versions of Raleigh Radford's guide stayed in print until 1985, but subsequent editions of the guidebook (Davison 1999) and the Batsford book on the site (Thomas 1993), informed by a re-assessment of the site as a high-status settlement and later by new excavations, took a more balanced approach, carefully explaining the link between the history and legends of the site. The current English Heritage red guidebook (Batey 2010) focuses primarily on the archaeological evidence, with the legendary associations of the site described within the final 'history' section.

Until the recent interpretation project, this guidebook (Batey 2010) provided the main source of information for visitors to the site, with a suggested walking route marked with small numbers. However, if visitors did not purchase the guidebook, there was very little else to help them engage with the geographical and historical complexities of the site. In a small room adjacent to the shop

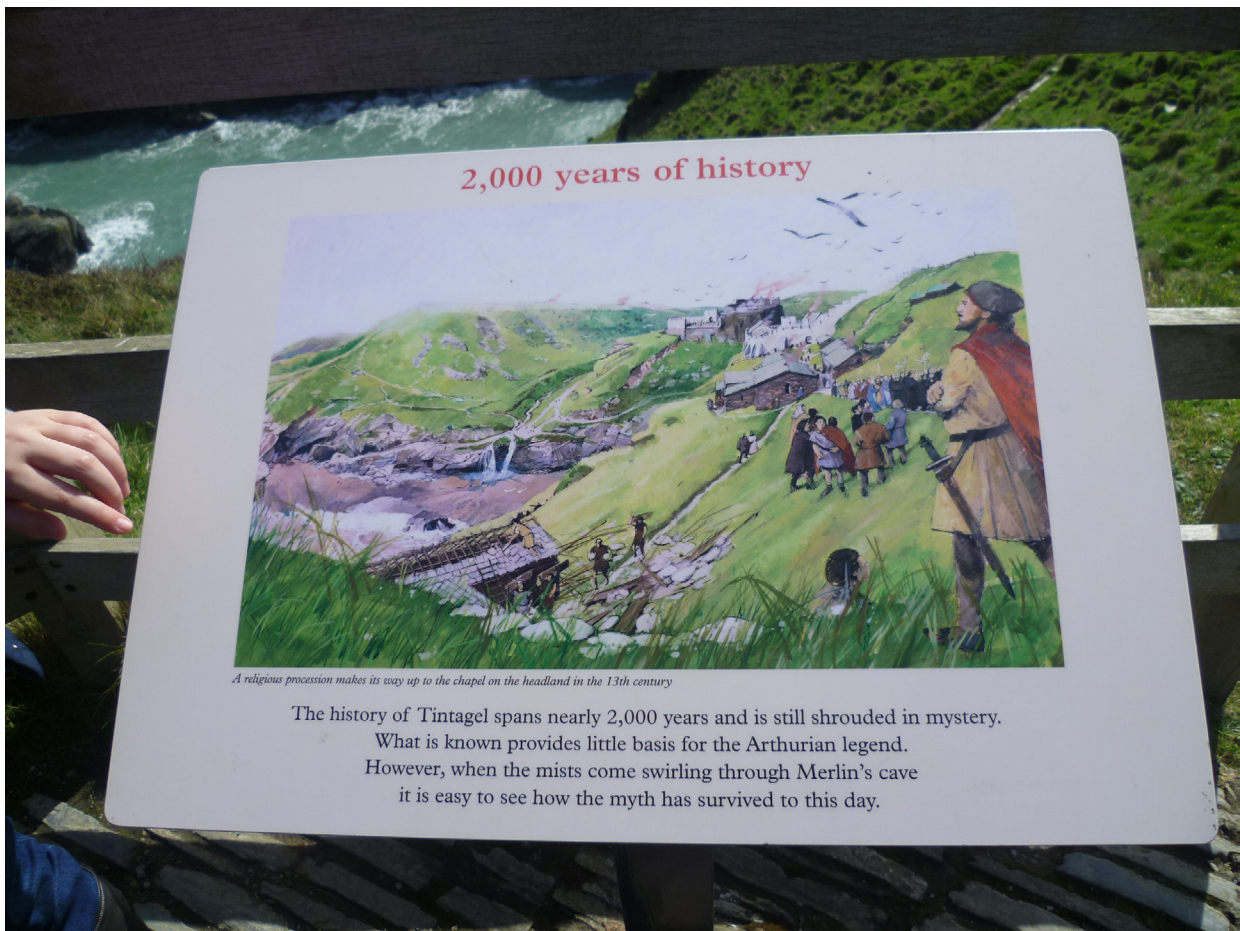


Figure 2: An interpretation panel located at the viewpoint on Tintagel headland, removed in 2016 (author's photograph)

was a seven-minute introductory film, with a large graphic panel entitled 'Search for Arthur: did King Arthur once live here?' The film itself tried to give an emphatic answer: no. Through a slightly vague overview of the site through shadowy characters and quite a lot of dry ice, the film essentially dispensed with the notion that Arthur was a real historical figure but rather located him in the mystical realm of Celtic traditions. Also in this room was a small case with a replica amphora and a copy of the famous 'Artognou' stone, a slate discovered during excavations in 1998 inscribed in Latin (Barrowman *et al.* 2007: 199). A few brief, cautionary and frankly unhelpful interpretation panels across the site featured reconstruction illustrations by Ivan Lapper and invited visitors to imagine King Arthur at Tintagel Castle. Frustratingly they provided very little concrete information about the ruins and earthworks that visitors could see (Figure 2).

Two insightful articles have reviewed the visitor interpretation at Tintagel Castle in the recent past, and provide more nuanced detail than given here. Assessing the visitor interpretation in the late 1980s (which included the graphic panels described above but not the film, which was installed in c. 2004) Robb (1988) concluded that the provision created a measure of ambiguity and uncertainty for the casual visitor. He portrayed this as a dilemma for English Heritage between presenting the officio-academic interpretation of the site, and acknowledging alternative accounts of the meaning of the complex. This assessment was updated and deepened by Orange and Laviolette (2010). The authors argued that pre-conceived notions of Arthur were both legitimated and slightly confused through heritage presentation on the site and elsewhere in the village. These articles were particularly influential on those of us

working on the 2015–2016 interpretation project, but as a whole the organisation had been aware for several years that the presentation at Tintagel Castle was limited, confusing and of poor quality. A project was needed to radically overhaul the way the site was presented to visitors.

Authenticity: knowing the site

In April 2015, English Heritage separated into two different bodies. A new independent charity retained the name and now looks after the collection of over 400 state guardianship historic properties, whereas the other statutory, policy and research roles have fallen to Historic England, which remains an arms-length government body. By 2022/2023, the amount of government grant that English Heritage receives will reduce to nothing, after which it must be financially self-sustaining. Investment in new and engaging interpretation schemes at our properties has become an important part of meeting this enormous challenge and the project at Tintagel Castle would be one of the first schemes to be delivered under the new charity.

At the time the project was being developed, English Heritage was writing its new strategic plan (English Heritage 2016). One of the stated core values for the organisation was authenticity: 'We seek to be true to the story of the places and artefacts that we look after and present. We don't exaggerate or make things up for entertainment's sake. Instead, through careful research, we separate fact from fiction and bring fascinating truth to light'. The difficulty of separating fact from fiction at sites like Tintagel Castle is obvious, making it difficult to meet the organisation's core value; this should be reviewed in future strategies. Authenticity is a particularly interesting term, much debated in heritage tourism (Cohen and Cohen 2012), and it links to the dilemma identified by Robb between presenting the academic history of the site and acknowledging alternative beliefs. As he noted, there was a perception among archaeologists and historians (at least in the 1980s) that growing beliefs in mysticism and geomancy could only be relieved by greater efforts in factual presentation (Robb 1988: 582). However, contrary to the English Heritage corporate aim quoted above, authenticity as defined by visitors is often not derived from factual information; it is derived from a range of aspects including physical setting, atmosphere and experience (Dallen and Boyd 2002: 254; Nguyen and Cheung 2015). This raises the question: what is the authentic story of Tintagel Castle?

Contrary to this perceived dichotomy, there is no division between the 'academic' or 'true' history of the site and the various alternative interpretations of the site's significance (there is much discussion of this in folklore studies and their relationship with ancient monuments, see Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf 1999). At Tintagel Castle, the archaeological and historical narrative is entirely intertwined with the legendary stories attached to the site, each one influencing the other (Orange and Laviolette 2010; Robb 1988; Thomas 1993). This is clear even in Tintagel Castle's scheduled monument description which includes reference to its legendary associations:

The monument's appearance in major 12th-century story-cycles has lent it widespread fame...and though bearing indirectly on the physical remains, the evolution to the present day of the monument's role in these stories provides an unusually well-documented example of the manner and motives by which folk memory and, later, recorded myths and legends can progress through time. (Historic England 2019)

There is not the space here to do justice to the full complexity of Tintagel Castle's history; readers are referred to the late Charles Thomas' excellent book (Thomas 1993) and the latest version of the guidebook (Batey 2010) for more information. The summary which follows is necessarily brief.

Various finds, including pottery and a hoard of late 3rd- and early 4th-century coins, suggest activity on the headland in the Roman period, when the 'island' of Tintagel was connected to the mainland by a land bridge. From about AD 450 until 650 the headland at Tintagel was a prosperous and highly significant settlement, closely involved in trade with the Mediterranean world. The island was covered

with many small rectangular buildings, some visible as earthworks or reconstructions today. A large bank and ditch, also still visible, defended the landward side of the narrow land bridge; this feature cut off the strongly defendable island which had extensive views and fresh water supplies. The importance of the site is evident from the many hundreds of sherds of imported Mediterranean pottery, including high-quality tableware, found on both the mainland and island, and amphorae. Such fragments have been found at sites all over western Britain and Ireland, but Tintagel has by far the largest quantity so far discovered, as well as fragments of Mediterranean glass (Barrowman *et al.* 2007: 332; Campbell 2007). These goods arrived in the south-western peninsula by ship as part of a trading system linked to the Mediterranean, which brought luxury goods presumably in exchange for tin (Duggan 2016). The most likely explanation of the site is that it was a major trading settlement and stronghold, probably high-status and likely to be the seasonal home of a regional king, perhaps the leader of the powerful kingdom of Dumnonia. At this time, a series of elites appear to adopt food, drink, objects and lifestyles befitting their 'Roman' connections and constructing for themselves a new identity in post-Roman Britain (Dark 2014).

It was in about 1137 that Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, provided the earliest written mention of Tintagel in a tale of how Arthur was conceived (Padel 1984). Geoffrey claimed that Uther Pendragon, King of Britain, sired Arthur, the result of his magically assisted seduction of Queen Igera (Igraine), wife of Duke Gorlois of Cornwall. Geoffrey's *History* gave the figure of King Arthur, the legendary ruler of Britain, Ireland and large parts of continental Europe, its international fame. Note that Tintagel is King Arthur's place of conception, not his birthplace, as is often inaccurately cited. The 'birthplace' claim was not actually recorded until 1478, when the antiquary William Worcester gave Tintagel as the place of Arthur's birth as well as his conception (Harvey 1969).

The reasons for Geoffrey's selection of Tintagel for the setting of Arthur's conception can only be guessed. Geoffrey described its dramatic physical attributes and its narrow entrance in detail, suggesting that he may have visited the site himself. He associated Arthur closely with Cornwall, and Cornish legend may have preserved a folk memory of the earlier importance of the site, perhaps as a stronghold of the rulers of Cornwall (Padel 1984). More important in medieval literature is the story of Tristan and Iseult, a legend with strong Cornish connections (Jenner 1926; Padel 1981). Known from French and German poems of the late 12th century, particularly those of Beroul, these stories appear to have drawn on Cornish traditions. Tintagel features as the court of Tristan's uncle, King Mark of Cornwall, and is the setting for most of the scenes in the narrative. The visible remains on the headland no doubt helped to keep alive a memory of its former importance.

In May 1233, the newly created Earl of Cornwall, Richard, brother of Henry III, bought the 'Island of Tyntagel', together with 'Richard's castle', from Gervase de Tyntagel (TNA E36/57, fol. 44v). 'Richard's castle' was presumably built by the earl himself, and if so was begun between 1225, when King Henry granted him the county of Cornwall, and 1233, when the transaction took place. The choice of Tintagel for a castle seems strange - it had no obvious strategic purpose, it was far from centres of population and was difficult to access. However, it is likely that Richard was keen to exploit Tintagel's international literary fame and was deliberately building his castle at a traditional seat of Cornish power (Padel 1988; Goodall 2011: 189). For much of the 13th and 14th centuries, English kings claimed their descent from Arthur and used stories of his deeds to promote a chivalrous way of life among their followers (Creighton 2009: 72). The Arthurian round table, which hangs in the great hall at Winchester Castle, was probably made in 1290 for a royal tournament of King Edward I (Biddle 2000). Cornish people would have clearly understood the message of Richard of Cornwall's new castle as a bold statement about his power over the ancient kingdom (see Page 2000 and Jobson 2009 for more on relations between Richard and his Cornish barons). Equally important to Richard may have been the links to the love story of Tristan and Iseult. There are several unusual features of the castle, including an exposed cliff-top garden and a tunnel/'cave' which may have been constructed on his orders (Bowden 2017; Creighton 2009; Rose 1994;). Together with the chapel and a

well, these are features of King Mark's castle that were depicted frequently in Tristan's narrative. Richard may have deliberately created a romantic and literary landscape at Tintagel (Bowden 2017; Rose 1994). This environment would have offered a secluded private landscape where he could spend time away from his royal duties (Page 2000). It is not known how often he visited Tintagel; he did not sign any charters from the castle but was probably there in 1242 when, according to Matthew Paris, he received his nephew, the Welsh prince Dafydd ap Llywelyn (Smith 2010).

By 1337, when the Duchy of Cornwall was created, the great hall of the castle was in decay; perhaps the constant coastal erosion of the site had caused a partial collapse of the stem of the headland around this time (TNA E120/1). A small staff, including a chaplain, was employed to look after the castle and chapel, and in the late 14th century two high-status prisoners were brought there from London for secure keeping. By 1441, account rolls describe the site for the first time as an island in use as a rabbit warren, suggesting the castle was largely abandoned, probably after a major cliff fall in about 1400, which permanently separated the outer and middle wards from the inner ward (Cornwall Record Office AR/2/719/5).

Several antiquarian writers mentioned the castle and its legendary links (e.g. Leland, Norden and Carew; Thomas 1993: 27, 42 and 45), but it is not until the early 19th century that the connections between King Arthur and Tintagel begin to dominate. In 1816, the first widely available modern version of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* was published, followed by nine other editions before 1900. Malory's book inspired a huge number of spin-off books, paintings and poems (Parker and Wagner 2014: 25). Another key figure in propelling Tintagel and its surrounding area to fame was Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who first visited in 1848 and was inspired to write the 'Idylls of the King', published in 1859 (Ricks 2006). Rev. Kinsman, a local vicar, was responsible for creating the steps up to the headland and building a suitably castellated wall and doorway across the inner courtyard, making the castle much more accessible for late 19th-century tourists (Thomas 1988: 38). Victorian visitors flocked to the ruins of 'King Arthur's Castle' and the nearby village of Trevena (modern Tintagel) flourished to cater for their needs (Berry *et al.* 2003). In 1899, the ostentatious King Arthur's Castle Hotel (now Camelot Castle Hotel) was built, set on the cliffs overlooking Tintagel Castle. It was designed as a terminus hotel for a planned railway branch line from Camelford, which never arrived. The main branch, which had opened in 1893, had however brought more visitors to the inscribed stone at Slaughterbridge (Figure 1), where a ticket office was opened.

The legends connected with the site emerged in response to the physical reality and perhaps collective memory of the early medieval trading settlement. Earl Richard's castle was directly influenced by these legends in terms of its location, form and features, through which the Tristan and Iseult story, if not Arthurian stories, were referenced. Finally, the site's later influence on artists and poets directly drew on versions of these legends, creating a Victorian tourist attraction and affecting the physical appearance of the castle. The title chosen for the exhibition was 'Tintagel Castle: where history meets legend' to encapsulate that close connection and the inseparability of the two elements rather than falsely discarding one in favour of the other. Telling the authentic story of Tintagel Castle therefore was not to choose between the 'true' history and legendary history or 'alternative' ideas, but to clearly explain the tangible and intangible aspects of the site's history in order to do justice to this complex and fascinating place.

Understanding our visitors

Before developing the interpretation scheme, the team needed to understand our visitors and potential visitors. A 2012/2013 annual visitor survey had shown that the proportion of parties with children visiting Tintagel Castle was around 46%, the highest of all English Heritage properties. The age profile was overwhelmingly young, with visitors over 55 years old accounting for only 23% of admissions. Older visitors are put off by the large numbers of steps required to reach the site but this profile is also a reflection of the position of Tintagel on the North Cornwall coast which is a popular destination for family holidays. The vast majority (89%) of visitors are on a short break or longer holiday, with the

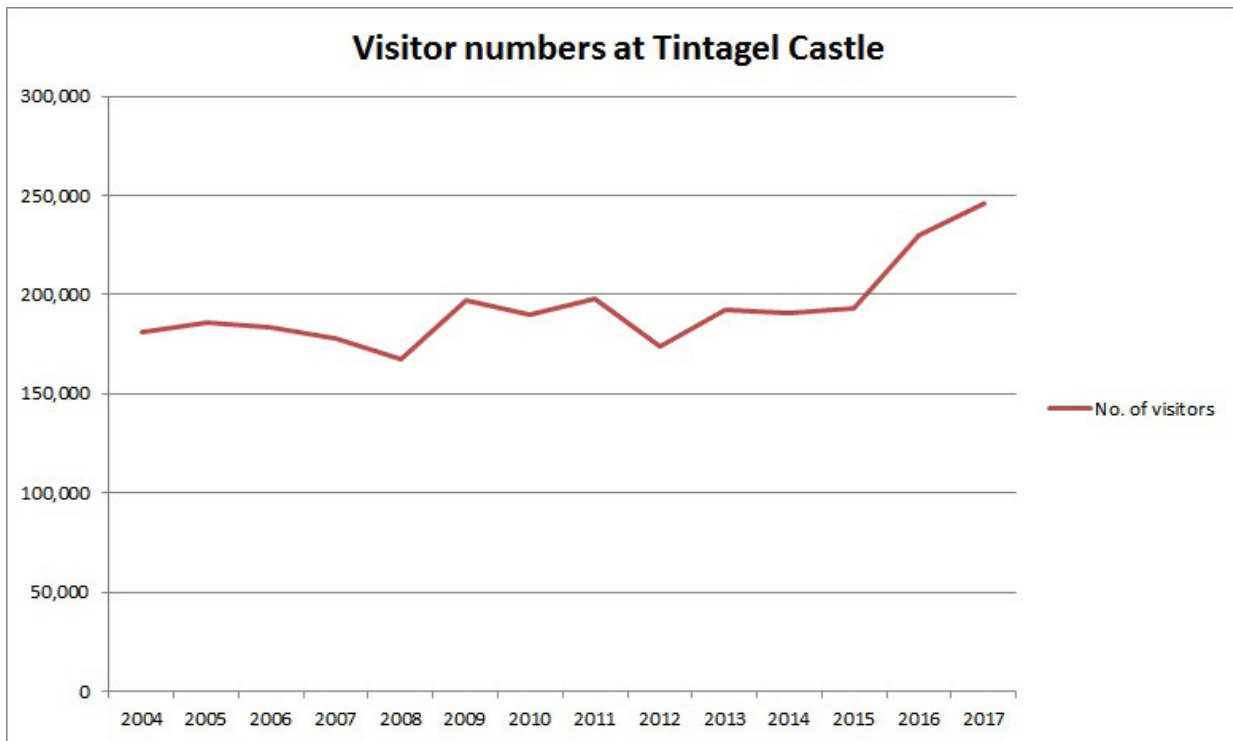


Figure 3: Visitor numbers at Tintagel Castle, based on data from Association of Leading Visitor Attractions

majority from the UK (86%) rather than international visitors (13%) (RDSi 2016). Visitor numbers were fairly static at around 200,000 visitors a year (Figure 3).

When asked about positives and negatives of the site, visitors cited as positive the opportunity to explore the site at their own pace, the beautiful and dramatic coastal surroundings and the unique nature of the site (Figure 4). However, visitors were negative about the lack of interactive opportunities, the lack of opportunity to learn about the site and the lack of opportunity for them and their children to have fun.

As Robb (1988, 583) had noted, ‘Arthurian myth has become inextricably linked to visitor expectation’. But what did our visitors already know? What did they imagine? What did they want to learn about? A previous survey of 50 visitors had found that almost all had a prior association of Tintagel with the legends of King Arthur, with most guessing that he had lived sometime between AD 400 and 900 (Orange and Laviolette 2010: 94). English Heritage commissioned a more detailed pre-project evaluation as part of a wider review of proposals for the site, with surveys undertaken with both visitors (176) and non-visitors (186, i.e. those who visited Tintagel village but not the castle) in August and September 2014 (BDRC Continental 2016). All respondents were asked about their knowledge before visiting. From their responses it was surmised that 56% knew that it was a medieval castle; 31% a castle where King Arthur had lived; 30% the birthplace of King Arthur (sic) and 24% that it was the site of a ‘Dark Age’ settlement. When asked what they would like to find out more about, the medieval castle and its inhabitants was most frequently cited (48%), followed by the legend of King Arthur (38%). This latter was mentioned by nearly half of visitors that fall into the then current segment of ‘child-pleasing’ visitors, showing that this was a particularly appealing topic to those with primary school age children.

Imagination: developing the project

With a good understanding of our visitors, and a thorough understanding of the site, the project team could begin to develop the interpretation project. Another of the core values in the new English



Figure 4: A view across the low walls of the early medieval buildings and inner castle courtyard at Tintagel, towards the mainland courtyard (Historic England, James Davies)



Figure 5: The small exhibition space provides visitors with an overview of the key phases of the site's history (© English Heritage, Emily Wickfield-Wicks)

Heritage strategic plan was imagination: ‘We seek to be imaginative in the way that history is brought to life, thinking creatively, using the most effective means, surprising and delighting people. We want each experience to be vivid, alive and unforgettable’ (English Heritage 2016). Here was a call to those of us working on the interpretation team to think imaginatively about new and innovative ways to deliver interpretation to visitors at Tintagel. The extremely rugged and exposed landscape with a large number of steps, the limited amount of indoor space, and the relatively unimpressive architecture of the castle itself, were challenges in conveying the key messages. Several key features (e.g. Arthur’s footprint) are located close to cliff edges and could not be included in the guidebook or interpretation panels due to safety concerns. Audio tours or multimedia devices were simply too dangerous – visitors needed both hands to hold onto railings, belongings or children. Guided tours were also unsuitable as a key method of delivering interpretation due to the sheer number of visitors and the steps up to the headland which can result in queues of 40 minutes in the peak season. However, the wild and rugged nature of the site also encourages exploration and provides a sense of adventure. The team strongly felt that we did not want to spoil that sense of self-led discovery for our visitors with overly proscribed routes around the site; furthermore, we wanted to disperse people out across the whole headland, to reduce the pressure of visitor numbers and erosion in the core areas of the site, particularly near the Great Hall and Chapel.

The indoor interpretation space at Tintagel was limited to the small room adjacent to the shop where the introductory film had been located (initial proposals to extend this building were dropped in an early phase of the project for reasons of cost and sensitivity over planning permission and other consents). It was decided to create an introductory exhibition in this space (Figure 5), providing an overview of the key stories, with archaeological objects from the site on display at Tintagel for the first time and an innovative 3D-printed model of the site with a film projection-mapped onto it (Figure 6). This gives visitors an overview of the layout of the site, and a vivid sense of how the headland changed through

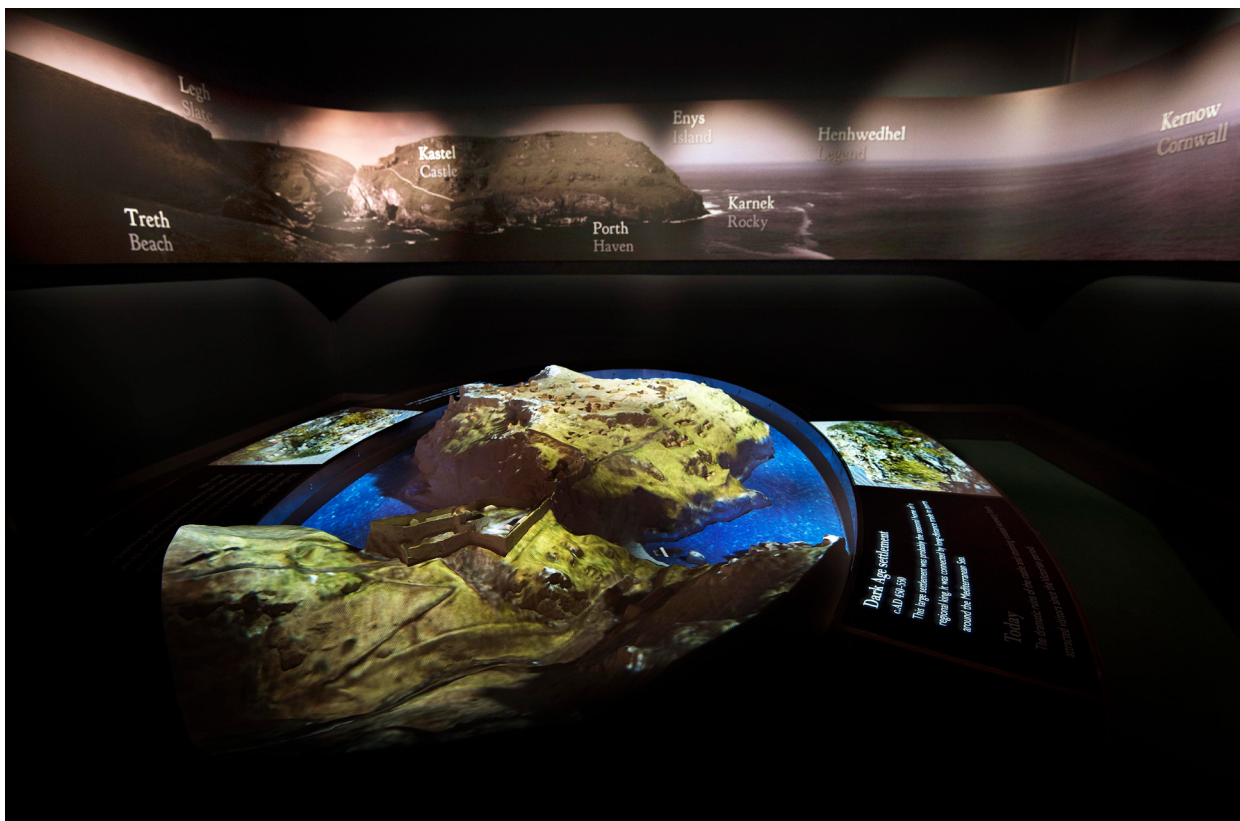


Figure 6: An interactive model in the exhibition provides visitors with a perspective on the layout of the headland and the changes of the site over time (© English Heritage, Emily Wickfield-Wicks)



Figure 7: Visitors reading the interpretation panel that describes the Great Hall, with bronze sculptures by Rubin Eynon (author's photograph)

time. The exhibition is divided into four key areas: the beginning of the legend, the early medieval settlement, the medieval castle and Tintagel as inspiration. The overall design of the graphics drew on the idea of open book leaves, and two book sculptures were specially commissioned and located at low level for younger visitors, representing both the Arthurian and Tristan legends. On the back wall is a panoramic photograph with a number of key words translated into Cornish, as is the exhibition title and the graphic panel titles in the exterior scheme. This inclusion of Cornish translations, since replicated at a scheme at Chysauster Ancient Village, was agreed as a policy for all new English Heritage signage in Cornwall after a joint meeting with representatives from Cornwall Council, the Celtic League (an NGO which aims to promote modern Celtic identity in the Celtic nations), the Cornish Language Partnership (a representative body that seeks to promote the use of Cornish language) and Gorsedh Kernow (an organisation that aims to preserve Celtic history and culture in Cornwall) in November 2014.

The exhibition opened to the public in July 2015 as part of the first implementation phase of the project, together with refurbishment of the café and shop, the creation of a new membership sales area and a new link bridge between the café and shop. The café, once the headquarters of the galena mine under the cliff, was hung with historic photographs showing the industrial and early tourist history of Tintagel.

The second phase of the project to be implemented was the external interpretation signage and artistic installations. English Heritage had appointed interpretation designers Bright 3D (based in Edinburgh) to the project, specifically because of their experience delivering outdoor interpretation. The team had been particularly impressed with their recent work at Knockan Crag in Ullapool, Scotland and at



Figure 8: The chapel panel displays the story of a priest who abandoned his post as chaplain at Tintagel Castle in 1361, with accompanying bronze sculptures by Rubin Eynon (author's photograph)

Blaenavon Ironworks in Wales, where they had introduced innovative sculptural artworks using local materials to convey interpretative messages. Working with Bright 3D, wayfinding and interpretation signage had been reviewed across the whole site, from the entrance in the village to the far side of the headland.

The core part of the exterior interpretation scheme delivered is a series of 18 interpretation boards, ranging from small labels to larger panels (Figures 7 and 8). These were located at key information points, and were mounted on plinths made of local machine-cut slate to fit in, but remain distinct from, the surrounding ruins. Where their position might be thought to interfere with the open and wild nature of the headland, these were located unobtrusively close to the ground. Four of these panels had additional bronze artwork elements to them, designed by Bright 3D in collaboration with artist Rubin Eynon (see below). For example, the panel that explains the Great Hall of the castle has the remains of a medieval feast – a knife, a half-eaten piece of bread, a goblet and an apple core – giving younger visitors something to explore and providing a hint of the sorts of activities that might have taken place in that location (Figure 7). The panel that describes part of the early medieval trading settlement has two amphorae leaning against the stone plinth. In contrast to the small fragments of pottery on display in the visitor centre, these bronzes provide a sense of the scale and shape of the full-sized vessels, whilst their material makes clear that they are not original objects.

During the process of writing these four particular panels, each of which also features a reconstruction illustration (six new reconstructions of the site were commissioned from artists Bob Marshall and Aaron



Figure 9: The carving of Merlin's face by Peter Graham on the beach at Tintagel. His nose was damaged, presumably intentionally, about a month after the launch of the completed interpretation project (author's photograph)



Figure 10: 'Gallos' sculpture by Rubin Eynon on the cliffs at Tintagel (author's photograph)

Watson), it became clear to the author that these could be written as stories. This is how a series of brief narratives emerged: Prince Dafydd's tale, the trader's tale, the priest's tale and the sheriff's tale. All these parables were based on known events documented in historical records from the site.

It was decided to use artistic methods to convey the legendary associations of the site, in the same way that the book sculptures had been used in the exhibition. These installations were designed to be interactive, to appeal to families and children and to be varied aspects that visitors would discover, and be surprised by, during exploration of the site. Bright 3D recommended metalwork artist Rubin Eynon, who immediately impressed the team with his ideas for both the sculptural elements on the panels and ideas for larger installations. Most of the legendary stories could be easily located at a relevant location. The love tryst of Tristan and Iseult in the walled garden was conveyed by installing 'story slabs' that invited visitors to walk around the garden, stopping to read a line from one of the scenes set there. The association of Merlin with the cave and the beach was highlighted with a 30cm-tall carving of his face into the rock, created by Cornwall-based stone carver Peter Graham. Carving directly into the stone brought variety to the range of artistic elements on the site, and by using the natural materials on the beach, was intended to be discreet and not noticeable from any distance. It was hoped that people would stumble across it and be surprised (Figure 9). A viewing point near the entrance to the site provided a suitable location for a compass, based on the idea of a round table, giving other key places linked to the story of Arthur. Yet the key character in visitor's minds was unlocatable; King Arthur was somehow everywhere and yet nowhere.

The artist was asked to come up with a statue or installation that portrayed a shadowy ruler, a figure who was present and absent at the same time (Figure 10). Towards the end of the project the project team gave the statue a name, 'Gallos', meaning 'power' in Cornish. Was this Arthur? Or was it a powerful early medieval ruler? Or perhaps Earl Richard of Cornwall himself? These characters, equally shadowy in respect of their connection to Tintagel, have all played a significant part in the history of the site. The aim of this and the other artistic installations was to make the intangible tangible for our visitors but to retain a degree of ambiguity.

None of the artistic elements were provided with interpretation panels, although they were located on the orientation map in the guidebook, which was slightly revised to include these features and the new reconstruction images. This was deliberate; they were there to inspire and to stir the imagination.

It was decided to locate the statue on the far side of the headland, where it could not be seen from any of the historic ruins or from the approach to the castle. It was hoped that its location here would draw visitors away from the historic ruins where the pressure of erosion and overcrowding was most intense.

The interpretation scheme took over a year to develop, and went through several iterations, with approval sought from Historic England through scheduled monument consent and from Cornwall Council via a full planning application. Natural England and the National Trust were consulted about the scheme, as were Tintagel Parish Council. No objections were received, although comments conveyed through these processes were taken on board, with elements of the scheme altered accordingly, or mitigation measures put in place (e.g. monitoring for erosion on the headland). This second part of the scheme was launched in late April 2016.

Unintended consequences

The scheme opening did not begin well, with English Heritage choosing to 'trail' the launch in early February 2016 by revealing the completion of the carving of Merlin's face on the beach. Unfortunately, the photograph chosen to accompany this announcement was a panorama which made the sculpture look like something akin to Mount Rushmore. In reality, it is life-size and discreetly located among the rocks and boulders of the beach; much more obtrusive are the modern concrete and metal steps and the

falling rocks warning sign. This is not an untouched natural landscape (as claimed, e.g. Anon 2016); for the past 200 years this has been an industrial landscape, with a galena (lead and silver) mine operating and nearby slate quarries using the harbour to export their products (Sharpe 1990; Thomas 1993: 27).

The reaction to the unveiling of the artwork was immediate and visceral, led initially by 'Kernow Matters to Us', a Cornish nationalist pressure-group. In statements made to the national press, the group expressed deep shock at the sculpture, 'Where at Tintagel does English Heritage tell anything about [regional] kings? Is there even a mention of them? By doing this, Cornish history gets sidelined, while English Heritage concentrates on dumbed-down populist trash that they think will attract the punters' (Telegraph 2016). Cornwall councillor Bert Biscoe expressed his disgust in a letter to English Heritage and circulated to the press, 'If we start carving comic book characters into the geology, where do we stop? This is not Disneyland, it's Cornwall' (Morris 2016a).

The reaction was portrayed by several newspapers as a 'row' or 'battle' over Tintagel (e.g. Morris 2016a) and members of the team were interviewed by various media organisations, including the author on BBC's *The One Show*. Archaeologists and heritage professionals expressed their views on social media, opinion pieces and blogs, some challenging this focus (e.g. Goskar 2016c) and others arguing that legends and history should both be represented (e.g. Williams 2016a). English Heritage received letters from the Bude, Stratton and District Old Cornwall Society, The Cornish Association of Local Historians and Kernow Matters To Us, each essentially arguing that presenting the 'mythical fantasies' of King Arthur eclipsed the real story of Tintagel, expressing the dichotomy already noted between 'real' and 'fantasy' history. Their opinion was that to present anything other than the key part of the archaeological story – the occupation from the 5th to 7th centuries – was to dilute and down-play that pre-eminent period. Even discussion of the medieval castle was thought to be a distraction, perhaps as it is perceived as representing a period of 'colonial' English rule; any consideration of mythology was even worse. That English Heritage had presented several aspects of the site's history and mythology showed that the organisation was frivolous, insufficiently rigorous with information and fundamentally driven to make money, through choosing to promote populist messages. Cllr Andrew Long, representing Mebyon Kernow, a political party in Cornwall that campaigns for devolution, issued a statement, 'We have always had our doubts that 'English Heritage' understand or care about Cornwall's past and this example of vandalism is just another sign that the time for this organisation to be removed from looking after our assets has now arrived'.

This last comment reveals that the reaction to the carving needs to be set into a wider context. There have been arguments for Cornwall to be recognised as a separate nation rather than a county of England, since at least the early 20th century (see Deacon 2016; Trower 2015; Payton 2017). In April 2014, the Cornish were recognised as having the status of a Protected National Minority (under the Council of Europe Framework convention for the Protection of National Minorities) and funding was given for teaching and promoting the Cornish language. In September 2011, George Eustice, Member of Parliament for Camborne and Redruth, argued that Cornwall's heritage should be administered by a Cornish organisation rather than English Heritage. More recent calls for all aspects of heritage to be locally managed are part of the wider 'Case for Cornwall' devolution proposals, an on-going debate at local and government level (Cornwall Council 2015, 2018a). For many years signage at English Heritage sites in Cornwall has been vandalised, with the name of the organisation or logo, and the word 'English' often scratched or burnt out (Figure 11). Many signs were damaged in 1999 during 'Operation Chough', when members of the 'Revived Cornish Stannary Parliament' undertook direct action, claiming the signage to be 'racially motivated' and 'deeply offensive' (Morris 2002). Since these incidents, the unstaffed and free properties managed by English Heritage in Cornwall have not featured our logo or name, but instead carry the logo of the Cornwall Heritage Trust, with whom there are local agreements to maintain the sites. English Heritage was aware of these issues and had been (and still is) working for some time with various Cornish groups to improve relations. The organisation has taken a number of steps to improve perception of its presence in Cornwall, such as not using its current strapline ('Step



Figure 11: Vandalised English Heritage sign in June 2015 at Chysauster Ancient Village, near Penzance (author's photograph)

into England's Story') on any branding or merchandise in the area, and flying the St Piran's flag, instead of an English Heritage one, at its manned sites. As noted above, the organisation had already made steps to integrate Cornish language into interpretation schemes. It was unfortunate then, that the backlash was partly caused by the organisation's poor marketing strategy, presenting the carving separately to all the other aspects of the scheme, and thereby playing straight into the hands of people who already felt very strongly about English Heritage's involvement in 'their' heritage.

The launch of the rest of the scheme, in April 2016, brought yet more criticism, largely from those who had read only the newspaper headlines, rather than seeing the scheme themselves. 'Kingly statue plunges sword into Tintagel's Arthurian row' read a second *Guardian* headline (Morris 2016b). This was despite our best efforts to invite the most vocal of opponents to visit the site to see the full extent of the project, including the exhibition that had been opened the previous year. The scheme received a lot of coverage, with rather mixed reactions from the press and English Heritage received a few letters of support, as well as negative comments.

It is interesting that the installation of a statue and the carving of Merlin's face should cause such controversy. Large statues have been installed at sites run by Cadw (e.g. Conwy Castle, Beaumaris Castle, Blaenavon), by Historic Royal Palaces (e.g. Tower of London) and by Historic Scotland (e.g. Linlithgow Palace). A number of other English Heritage sites have featured interpretative sculptures over the past two decades, such as Helmsley Castle, Middleham Castle and Mount Grace Priory, and more recently at Battle Abbey. Although these have been installed largely without controversy, the recently proposed

'iron ring' sculpture at Flint Castle in Flintshire, which was shelved after public outcry when the design was unveiled (Williams 2017), has some parallels with the Tintagel Castle furore. The ring was seen as a clear symbol of Welsh oppression, which people clearly did not want to see celebrated.

Although the Merlin carving can be seen as far more permanent and intrusive to the site, the medium of carving into the natural rock was deliberately chosen as a less intrusive and more 'hidden' way of adding an intriguing message. The archaeological, aesthetic, natural and geological impact of the Tintagel installations had been assessed at length both internally and through the consultation process, to ensure that their location, materials and scale would not overwhelm the natural beauty of the site nor the archaeological value of the visible remains. Contrary to how they first may appear, the changes to the site are reversible; the statue and installations can be removed, the rock carving will erode (the artist estimates it will last perhaps 10–15 years) and no doubt the exhibition will be updated on a similar timescale; interpretation projects tend to have a lifespan of about 10 years.

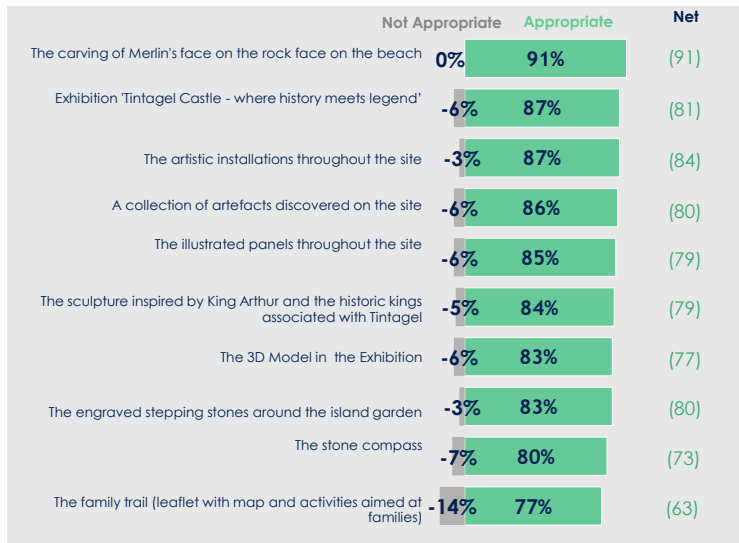
#Stopthedarkages

Towards the end of April 2016, the hashtag #stopthedarkages was first used on Twitter by Tehmina Goskar, a curator and historian based in Cornwall, and Dr Leonie Hicks, a Senior Lecturer in History at Canterbury Christ Church University (Goskar 2016b, Hicks 2016). This was in protest against the Tintagel project in general, but specifically about our use of the terminology 'Dark Ages' in the interpretation project. It was pointed out that this was an obsolete, value-laden term that had long been 'abandoned'. The use of 'Dark Age' in Cornwall was seen as offensive and pejorative, presumably because it was interpreted as deliberately playing down a period of Cornish cultural superiority over their Anglo-Saxon neighbours. The hashtag was picked up and quickly shared by a number of heritage professionals and academics and the issue was further explored in some highly critical blog posts (Anon 2016; Goskar 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

As lead researcher and writer lead on the project, this came as something of a shock. When writing the interpretation, consideration was given as to how to refer to this period, understanding that the term 'Dark Ages' was for several reasons problematic. However, the terms 'post-Roman' and 'pre-Saxon' did not accurately reflect the context of this period in Cornwall. More scholarly names such as 'Late Antiquity', 'Migration Period' or 'early Christian' are all potentially confusing or even misleading for the general public. 'Early Medieval' or 'Early Middle Ages' are perhaps the most suitable, but it was felt that this did not distinguish this phase of activity at the site enough from the later medieval castle buildings at Tintagel; the sequence was confusing enough for visitors. Ken Dark (2004), Associate Professor at the University of Reading, had concluded that 'Dark Ages' was not a particularly bad term to use, as it is widely understood by public and scholars alike, although he also argued that 'Late Antiquity' was a more appropriate term in an academic context (Dark 2014). English Heritage already used the term on its website and handbook as one of the key time periods in the 'Story of England' and it was used in the Tintagel Castle site guidebook, particularly to differentiate between this period and the later medieval castle (Batey 2010). Furthermore, a number of popular and academic books and television programmes had used the wording in recent times (e.g. Halsall 2013; Januszczak 2014; Toolis and Bowles 2016; Wood 2005). In a very limited word count (the entire exhibition is around 1000 words in total, covering all four themes) there was not the space to explain the nuances of the chosen terminology, although the issue is covered in slightly more detail in the site guidebook (Batey 2010: 27–8, admittedly the consistency of use is not entirely satisfactory, as highlighted by Williams (2016b)). As the exhibition showed and explained the extraordinarily rich and probably elite trading settlement, it did, however, emphasise implicitly that this period was very far from dark.

The debate and vocal criticism on social media was renewed by an editorial piece in *History Today* magazine, which expanded the criticism to how English Heritage used the terminology more generally,

While visitors are surprised by the installations, they are well received and seen as highly appropriate



As we saw in the previous slide, a number of the elements surprise visitors. However these are good as opposed to bad surprises, as **all elements of the interpretation are seen as highly appropriate** by visitors.

28

Source: C7d How appropriate do you feel it is for the following elements to be at a site like Tintagel Castle?
Base: All respondents rating it better than expected (171)

Figure 12: In a post-project evaluation, visitors had been asked 'How appropriate do you feel it is for the following elements to be at a site like Tintagel Castle? Appropriate or not appropriate.' RDSi 2016, report for English Heritage.

particularly within its 'Story of England' digital content; 'With this timeline, English Heritage is holding on to a Ladybird book approach to history, in which a new country can emerge from darkness. It is denying history' (Wiles 2016). This led to a further flurry of blog posts and opinion pieces (Hicks 2016, Hustwit 2016; West 2016). Only Williams (2016a and see links in 2016b) and Goskar (2016b) took the time to visit the site and assess the new interpretation, with Williams (2016b) even recognising some benefits of the use of 'Dark Ages' in certain contexts. There is a perception perhaps that criticism of English Heritage, at first sight a large and rather anonymous organisation, is justified and far from a personal attack. This is in part created by museums and heritage organisations refusing authorship for exhibitions and interpretative displays. At one level this 'protects' individual employees from scrutiny but as the teams that work on such projects usually consist of two or three people, it is difficult not to interpret criticism personally (Perry *et al.* 2015). Projects are delivered under huge pressure with high standards of historical research and accuracy expected, and individuals often having to produce the 'official' line on complex and finely balanced, sometimes political, questions.

As the clamour of critical voices from academic historians grew, colleagues at English Heritage, led by Lead Properties Curator Jeremy Ashbee, investigated the matter further and engaged in dialogue with some of the most vocal proponents. This was not something that affected only Tintagel; the debate had widened to how English Heritage chose to refer to this period across all its properties and in 'the story of England'. Constructive discussions resulted in the removal of this terminology from the general descriptions of this period on our website, handbook and other materials, where 'early medieval' is now used to describe the period from c. 410–1066 (English Heritage 2019a), although the description explains that this period has been traditionally known as the 'Dark Ages'. The text on the panels and in the exhibition at Tintagel have not yet been amended, partly because replacing these graphics is a costly exercise, but also because at this site, we feel that it is still helpful to retain a clear distinction between the early medieval ('Dark Age') period and the later medieval castle. However, there are on-going investigations into how English Heritage can convey some of the difficulties and nuances of this

terminology to visitors, as part of revised guidebook to be delivered on site this year and potentially through additions to the existing interpretation.

Reflections

The response to the 2015/2016 interpretation project from our visitors has been overwhelmingly positive (Figure 12). A post-project evaluation survey carried out in the summer of 2016 (RDSi 2016) asked 171 visitors which aspects of their visit stood out as their favourite. The top things mentioned spontaneously were the Gallos statue (41%) and the illustrated panels around the site (21%). When asked to rate various aspects of their visit, people particularly enjoyed the engraved stepping stones in the garden (77% rating them as excellent), the illustrated panels (77% excellent), the sculpture (76%) and the 3D model in the exhibition (75%). Only a small number of visitors discovered Merlin's face on the beach, but those that did enjoyed this 'secret find'. Just under half (46%) said that they were surprised by the artistic installations but they were also seen as highly appropriate (see Figure 10). When asked what they had learnt about on their visit, half of respondents said that they learnt about the connection between Tintagel Castle and King Arthur.

When asked in more detail, visitors were particularly excited by the Gallos statue, which acted a focal point for photographs and as a place to stop and admire the landscape. Quotes from visitors captured during the survey included 'to capture that ghostly form, it's eerie, kind of looks as if it's been there forever' and 'it was interesting and unusual, evocative of the site'. Repeat visitors were found to have particularly strong emotional responses to the illustrated panels, because they were such a step change from previous provision.

Feedback was not all positive of course. There are lots of improvements to be made to wayfinding and accessibility, making sure that visitors do not miss key elements of the site such as the on-site exhibition and the garden, and improving the family trail. All of these will be taken on board in future improvements to the presentation at the site.

As can be seen from Figure 3, our visitor numbers since the project launched in 2015/6 have increased, rising 19% in 2016 and a further 7% in 2017. This was partly because of the extent of the national media coverage and controversy at the launch of the second phase of the project (the old adage, 'there is no such thing as bad publicity' rings at least partly true). In general, continuing visitor feedback has been a complete contrast to the initial criticism of the project led by Cornish nationalists, heritage professionals and academic historians. The project team were therefore extremely pleased to receive a 'Runner Up' award in the 2017 Association for Heritage Interpretation awards in the Museums and Historic Properties/Sites category, which reflected the views of interpretation specialists on the project.

Conclusion

The interpretation project at Tintagel Castle has highlighted the fact that archaeology, history and heritage are intensely political matters, and that archaeology has a complex entanglement with contemporary culture and identity. Our attempts to push at the boundaries of on-site interpretation, to think imaginatively about how to deliver key messages to our visitors and to make the site fun and engaging for our core family audience, were met with hostility, partly due to a much wider debate surrounding political and cultural identity. There are important lessons to be learnt in several respects. Where schemes are unusual or likely to be controversial, English Heritage needs to proactively consult and engage with local communities about the content of interpretation schemes, beyond its mere statutory duties. This has recently been put into practice with a project to build a new footbridge across to the island at Tintagel (English Heritage 2019b) and with a recent conservation project at Ironbridge in Telford, Shropshire (English Heritage 2019c). There is much more scope here to co-create schemes with local stakeholders and the community, although this of course has an impact on the cost and lead-in times for such projects,

increasingly constrained by the financial position of the charity. Internally, the organisation needs to be better at communication between departments; interpretation teams need to articulate and summarise projects in better ways and public relations planning needs to be more thorough, with a detailed awareness of potential issues. While negative press coverage and criticism has a relatively short-term impact on the stress levels of staff, it has a much longer-term and potentially more damaging impact on perceptions of the organisation, particularly among our peers and stakeholders.

The ‘Dark Ages’ debate has been useful for shining a spotlight on the terminology we use in visitor interpretation and has led to widespread changes in the way that English Heritage use these words, if at all (Hicks 2017). The criticism also appears to have raised the profile of the period and this particular issue enormously, in part perhaps stimulating the ‘Digging into the Dark Ages’ conference and this related volume. Academics and heritage professionals debating issues about the way that heritage is presented can only be a good thing.

The situation in Cornwall is unique in England. For some Cornish people, heritage and tourism can give an uneasy sense of living in a theme park, where sites are misappropriated, preserved and commodified by outsiders, for outsiders, whilst the economic base and familiar landscapes of the living are under pressure. Many have made use of academic research to argue that the Celtic connections, ancient language and even the DNA of the population mark Cornwall as entirely different to the rest of England (e.g. Marsden 2015; Deacon 2016). Since the launch of the Tintagel interpretation project, English Heritage’s attendance at the Ertach Kernow (Heritage Cornwall) Board has offered us the chance to present ideas and receive direct feedback from many of those involved in Cornwall’s heritage. This group, with the support of Historic England, has commissioned a study of Cornish local distinctiveness, which will identify how cultural distinctiveness is represented in the historic environment and will be creating guidance to help manage heritage assets in Cornwall to best reflect their distinctive character (Cornwall Council 2018b).

Clearly, Tintagel Castle is part of Cornish history and identity. However, that is also a rather narrow perspective. Tintagel is part of western British history, part of English royal history and part of European literary history, among many possible contexts that could be cited. The interpretation scheme delivered at Tintagel now tells these different stories for our visitors in an inspiring and engaging way, ensuring that they leave with something more accurate than a vague idea of ‘King Arthur’s Castle’. Excavations in 2016 and 2017 commissioned by English Heritage and led by Cornwall Archaeological Unit are revealing fascinating new insights in the post-Roman settlement at Tintagel (Nowakowski 2018; Nowakowski and Gossip this volume). As this project progresses through post-excavation and publication, this changing story will continue to evolve.

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Digging up the Dark Ages in Cornwall: The Tintagel Challenge and St Piran's Oratory Experience

Jacqueline A Nowakowski and James Gossip

Our contribution reflects on the physical and intellectual challenges of excavating at Tintagel Castle and St Piran's Oratory, both iconic early medieval sites in Cornwall. The former, linked to King Arthur in legend, and the latter, linked to the adopted patron saint of Cornwall, St Piran. Alongside their linkages with 'historical' personages, both places are considered special, with unique ancient ruins. Tintagel is a towering headland covered in stone buildings and St Piran's Oratory is a diminutive stone 'church', dwarfed by massive sand dunes. Both lie on the seaways of the south-west peninsula, highlighting Cornwall's essential maritime identity.

In the wider public imagination, Tintagel and St Piran's Oratory are alive with 'big' stories of major characters: 'Dark Age' kings and saints. Both have histories of archaeological fieldwork and enquiry. Excavations at both sites will always have wider impact and significance, not only the enhancement of existing knowledge, but also for how new research may be accommodated and translated into the 'given histories' and popular perceptions of these singular places. The recent excavations at Tintagel and St Piran's oratory over the past few years have been projects with the key involvement of volunteers, reflecting current times as archaeological field practice becomes more inclusive. These ventures provide opportunities for everyone to be involved in conducting primary research on prestigious sites where amateurs and professionals work together. They create memorable experiences all round.

The chapter is not a formal appraisal but a reflective one: it draws directly on personal experience and feedback from the excavation teams as told in their own words. Community involvement clearly brings a new flush of energy to fieldwork, one that feeds on the daily surprises and thrills of excavation. Members of our teams have expressed their joy, empathy and particularly their feelings of the 'privilege' of having the opportunity to work at these sites. Along the way we have learnt that these opportunities have given a deeper connection to place, created a sense of awe and generated feelings of pride and ownership in helping to 'write history'. These values can be harnessed in celebrating and promoting our shared cultural heritage. While both projects provided practical 'hands on' experience(s) of digging up the 'Dark Ages', they also highlighted the challenges of how the grander stories may impact on archaeological fieldwork at these special sites.

Introduction: shared enterprises in 'Dark Age' public archaeology

In our chapter, we reflect on recent archaeological work at Tintagel Castle and St Piran's Oratory in Cornwall. Our contribution explores the challenges and experiences of conducting modern archaeological research at these two early medieval sites. Both places are associated with larger 'historical' characters whose legends create a pantheon of pseudo-histories which cast long shadows (see below). At both places, new archaeological fieldwork has recently been carried out with volunteers directed by small professional teams. These projects, run largely as community ventures, have allowed the physical and intellectual challenges that excavations present to be genuinely shared and explored. We want to show that the practice of doing archaeology – fieldwork, making discoveries, and sharing those experiences – can have a greater impact when it is a shared enterprise.

Our individual roles in both projects have been to lead and direct, develop ways of working with volunteer teams, share our technical expertise and academic knowledge and work with the teams to share the new knowledge with wider audiences. The volunteers on both projects described here come from a wide range of backgrounds, age and interest. Some have a great deal of fieldwork experience and others are new to archaeological adventures. Young and older members have worked together and the

excavations have created opportunities for people to work and learn together, and for new friendships to flourish and grow. The projects have also given many of the volunteers an opportunity to connect with place and to touch base with its unique qualities.

This paper is intended as a celebration of our collective working experience and what we have learnt all the way. We all shared in the excitement and thrill of the discovery of buildings and objects long hidden from sight uncovered by our teamwork. However, the volunteers have not only been digging, they have also contributed to the emergent discussions about interpretation and shared the results with others. Outreach has been at the heart of both the Tintagel and St Piran's oratory projects and it is a key role which our volunteer teams have been keen to participate in.

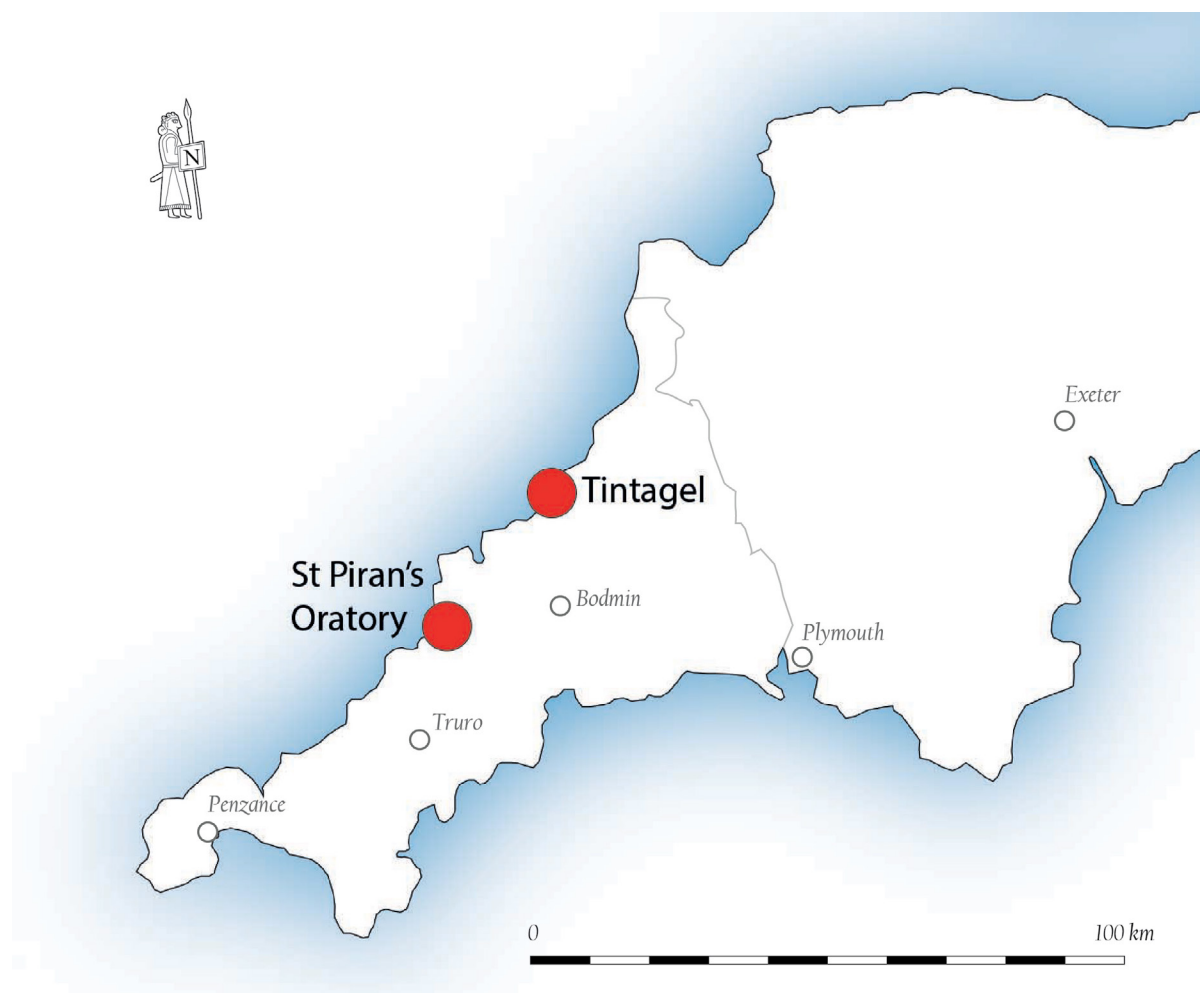


Figure 1: Map of Cornwall showing location of Tintagel and St Piran's Oratory (Source: J Gossip)

Tintagel Castle and St Piran's Oratory in a land of Dark Age kings and saints

Cornwall has a distinctive archaeological and historic cultural heritage much championed and celebrated by local communities and, judging by tourist numbers, by visitors too. The *Visit Cornwall*, official tourist board, survey of visitors to the county in 2016 showed a large number of visitors (38%) seek out and visit historical attractions.¹ Tintagel Castle in North Cornwall is a key destination. Thousands of visitors from all over the world flock to Tintagel each year to see the ruins of King Arthur's castle (Greaney this volume).

¹ www.visitcornwall.com.

St Piran's Oratory, Perranporth, has a more local appeal and Cornish reputation: hundreds undertake the annual pilgrimage celebrating the feast of St Piran on 5 March each year with a processional performance re-enacting St Piran's arrival in Cornwall from across the sea from Ireland taking place at St Piran's oratory. This is an important fixture for local and wider diaspora communities in the county calendar. Broadly speaking, Cornwall has, and is popularly perceived, as a faraway landscape of kings and saints (cf. Du Maurier 1967; Carter 2001; Deacon 2016) and both sites are closely associated with a regional identity which promotes a distinctive Celtic and Dark Age character. Tintagel, a suite of stone ruins perched upon a towering promontory is interpreted as a 'castle', assumed to be the seat of 'kingly' power, while St Piran's Oratory, a small stone building, has a saintly foundation and has a spiritual appeal, said to have been built by St Piran, Cornwall's adopted 'national' saint. For many, the distinctive history of each site is the fabric of foundation stories unique to Cornish history and formation of an Insular Dark Age identity (cf. Payton 2004; Deacon 2016; Figure 1).

Tintagel and St Piran's Oratory, therefore, have many shared attributes in terms of heritage value, prestige status, local and international standing. Both are designated scheduled ancient monuments which acknowledges their national significance and importance and protects their physical remains for future generations. Both appear early in the scheduling listing with clear acknowledgment of their special significance. Each has been subject to histories of archaeological investigations which have been geared towards conservation and consolidation of, principally, early medieval stone buildings. The process of recent investigation is thus similar, since archaeological fieldwork or research on each protected site requires a license from the Dept of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport with the agreement of Historic England. All fieldwork is carried out to agreed specifications guided by clearly targeted research aims. Tintagel Castle is managed on license by English Heritage Trust (Greaney this volume) and the St. Piran's Oratory is managed by the charity the St Pirans's Trust (see below). To conduct fieldwork at these places is considered a privilege by all those who have been involved in both projects.

Following summary introductions to these recent archaeological projects at Tintagel and St Piran's Oratory, our chapter then reflects on the two projects through volunteers' experiences. Two distinct voices may be heard but they share common themes united by the engagement. Our aim has been to capture those experiences through the words of members of the teams. Here we learn about the physical challenges, experiencing surprise, discovering empathy and spirituality, dealing with revelations and difficult issues, questions and healing – all ultimately become part and parcel of the experiences of digging the Dark Ages in Cornwall. The intellectual challenges of interpreting new Dark Age stories as the evidence unfolds becomes shared. What emerges is a clear awareness of how the larger 'historical' stories have a strong hold which can sometimes mask, smother or may even be at odds with the evidence presented by the unevenness of the archaeological record. We learn that excavations can never provide simple answers but provide tantalising new insights and, *always*, pose more questions, both about the early medieval period, and our present-day relationships with the 'Dark Age' in Cornwall.

Tintagel

Tintagel Castle and King Arthur

Arthur reigns supreme in Tintagel and few would wish to displace him. (Raleigh Radford 1942)

Historically and romantically Tintagel Castle is rather a fraud. (Jenner 1927)

Tintagel Castle lies in one of the most spectacular natural settings in western Britain: a striking promontory projecting from high cliffs along this fine part of the north Cornish coast. This towering

headland, grandiose, imposing and majestic, with its seemingly random scattering of stone ruins, is one of the most-visited sites in southern Britain. People come to visit Tintagel from all over the world. Some visit because of Tintagel's legendary associations with King Arthur: the Dark Age warrior, leader, and king of the ancient Britons popularly regarded as a Christian champion who fought against the pagan Saxon invaders (cf. Halsall 2013). Yet many come because it is a tourist destination rather than any historical or legendary association: it is a spectacular coastal landscape to explore.

The roots of mass tourism to Tintagel lie in the late 19th century: travellers sought out the place on a quest engendered by national Romanticism through the works of visiting painters, poets and writers: many were inspired by the stories of King Arthur (see Orange and Laviolette 2010). The origin of King Arthur's connection with Tintagel is a medieval invention by Geoffrey of Monmouth (Greaney this volume, and below), but few will disagree that the ruins on the headland which are imagined by many to represent King Arthur's Castle, are a major attraction, and a powerful place-maker. To many, the sites' overall aesthetic has the appeal of a 'Dark Age' fortress. Perched precariously high and out of easy reach from the mainland, there is an *other-world feel* about the place. One could imagine that Tintagel was cut off from the world, from the passage of time, unaffected by outside events.

It is clear, however, that the archaeological story at Tintagel is complex and the site has a major role in shaping our understanding of the cultural identity of post-Roman south-west Britain. For many in Cornwall, the discovery of an early medieval settlement at Tintagel represents the nexus of power for the local elite of Dumnonia, the ancient kingdom of south-west post-Roman Britain. It has been championed as a key place in Cornwall's first 'Golden Age' (cf. Deacon 2016). For others, the much later historical layer of Arthuriana creates false cultural memory, a Celtic romanticism, which may be at odds with modern Cornish sensibilities (cf. Alan Kent 2012).

The character of the stone ruins on Tintagel headland are mysterious and for any visitor they can even seem unconnected perhaps even presenting a bewildering exploration for the visitor. English Heritage's new interpretation project eloquently described by Susan Greaney (this volume) aims to enhance the visitor experience. The new excavations, under the project title Tintagel Castle Archaeological Research Project (TCARP) were a key part of this objective. Much of what the visitor initially encounters are the consolidated stone buildings of a medieval castle broadly considered to date to the 13th century and said to have been built by Earl Richard of Cornwall while the traces of early medieval dwellings are also visible on the east side of the headland as restored following excavations in the 1930s.

Some have argued that Earl Richard's motives for building a castle were influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, which linked the legendary King Arthur to Tintagel (Padel 1988). The ruins of the medieval castle are distinctly small-scale. They may often confound some visitor expectations. Of limited strategic value and lying in a seemingly remote and isolated place, medieval Tintagel Castle, presumably built at great expense, must have been a challenging project for Earl Richard to undertake. Oliver Creighton has suggested that this was a vanity (building) project, more folly than fortress (Creighton 2015: 331–332).

Yet under the Great Hall, which is built upon an artificial terrace (cut into bedrock), there is made ground of compacted layers and deposits which contain finds from a settlement dating to the 5th and 6th centuries AD: evidence for a significant earlier history (Thomas 1988a and see below). The curtain wall of the Inner Ward marks the edge of the medieval castle and contains the Great Hall. This wall was restored by the Rev. Richard Kinsman, who carried out repairs on the ruined castle in 1850s (Thomas 1993): the ridged crenulations neatly fit the look deemed suitable for a medieval castle (Figure 2).

Other (possibly related) medieval ruins lie scattered beyond this wall on the headland: the enigmatic square walled garden, the chapel, a well head, and a rock-cut tunnel. Collectively they appear to be the extramural fixtures of this medieval castle. Oliver Creighton has suggested they make up the 'contrived antiquity' at Tintagel (Creighton 2015). Mark Bowden has recently suggested that this is a 'theatrical' landscape inspired by the tragedy of the doomed lovers Tristan and Iseult. Their story involves the Cornish King Mark, a Dark Age figure with Cornish ancestry (cf. Padel 1981) and the places – that is the chapel, a cliff, tunnel and garden – are the props: the back-drop to the lovers' fated romance (as told by Beroul in the 12th century, see Bowden 2017). Whatever their explanation, it is true that these form a unique suite of ruins.

It is not known if Earl Richard ever visited the castle, but Earl Richard's clear territorial and political ambitions (which cast a wider net beyond England and across Europe) may have linked in with an international courtly audience interested in the legendary King Arthur. We should not perhaps forget that Tintagel headland, while stunning, is exposed and hardly hospitable. Oliver Padel and Oliver Creighton have suggested that Earl Richard wanted to harness something of the earlier power of the place, its Arthurian connection, into his rather fantasy castle (Creighton 2015; Padel 1988). It is *genius loci* supreme. The story of King Arthur, with its enduring historical global appeal, has tapped into shared universal values, so quite rightly his story has many champions, adherents and fans and, as Radford wrote, few, would wish to displace him (Radford 1942).²

So, while the Tintagel ruins may feel stranded and lost, this is an untamed high rocky promontory which looms from the sea: a major coastal citadel, with its proven early medieval story, clearly anchored to the opportunities facilitated by the sea. We know through archaeology that this was major place in the early medieval period, possibly associated with the kingdom of Dumnonia, with its connections to distant parts of the late Western Roman Empire. So like St. Piran's oratory, Tintagel was not only a significant place in the early medieval world but has continued to be significant throughout Cornish history to modern times.

By the 17th century early illustrations of Tintagel show a place severed from the mainland as major coastal erosion rendered the headland inaccessible. The abandoned ruins reclaimed by nature became overgrown: fossilised and forgotten relicts of another age. By the late 19th century, the headland's ruins had been left to grazing sheep (Figure 3). Early tourists started to seek out Tintagel to view the ruins of *King Arthur's Castle*. Many were entertained by personal tours given by the keeper of the castle. In the early 20th century, the guide was Florence Nightingale Richards who became a local character herself when the island shelter, named Florence's shelter, was built in the inner ward (Dyer 2005).

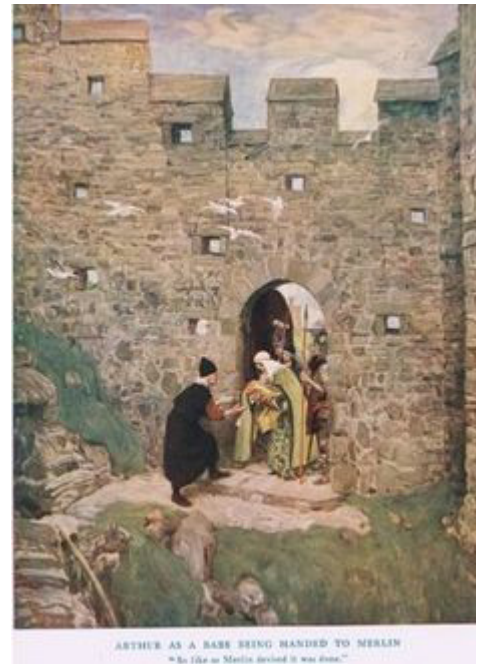


Figure 2: William Hatherell's painting of the young Arthur being spirited away by the magician Merlin depicts the quirky crenulations of Kinsman's restored curtain wall in the inner ward (complete with pug holes for the scaffolding)²

² <https://i.pinimg.com/236x/21/31/c0/2131c054bff7c3b15709c7c1a76b2029--pre-raphaelite-king-arthur.jpg>



Figure 3: Undated photograph of Tintagel on the headland looking towards the curtain wall showing the neglected stony ruins many years before excavations took place by Radford in the 1930s (Reproduced with kind permission from the Tintagel archive of the late Professor Charles Thomas held at the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Truro)

In the 1930s, when Tintagel passed into state guardianship, the parameters of any archaeological investigations had been laid down and were well assured: here lay a remote coastal promontory bursting with stone ruins associated with the legendary King Arthur.

Tintagel and archaeology

Meanwhile at Tintagel there have been two major campaigns of archaeological fieldwork in the last 80 years. Each time the focus of investigation has been on the rectangular stone buildings. In the 1930s these were restored as untidy clusters of abandoned ruins.

The first set of excavations directed by Courtney Arthur Raleigh Radford took place in the 1930s when the site went into guardianship. The site, owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, went under the stewardship and management of the Ministry of Works which today is English Heritage Trust (see Greaney this volume). Essentially a conservation and management project, the early excavations tidied up the stone ruins. A labouring team of unskilled men were employed to empty the stone rubble under the supervision of a local builder, in turn under Radford's direction. The team uncovered, rebuilt and restored stone walls (sites coded A to F; Barrowman *et al.* 2007). The historical neglect of the headland had ensured the growth of a tough maritime grass sward which sealed in the stone ruins, locked in their collapsed walls and buried rooms. In these drystone 'cells' or 'chambers' (as they were then called) many pot sherds were

found, and doorways, thresholds, benches and floors were revealed. Over several years of excavations (1933–1939, and 1955) a great deal of new information came to light. These stone buildings were dated by the pre-Norman pottery and Radford interpreted them as the buildings of an early Christian Celtic monastery (Radford 1935; Radford 1939).

During this work large quantities of extraordinary exotic (imported) pottery were found whose significance was only highlighted years later, and which brought Tintagel to the fore of early medieval research in Britain and its wider international significance (Radford 1956; Nowakowski 2018). Fragments of imported Late Roman amphorae (storage vessels) and fine table wares (the B and A wares respectively; Radford 1956; Thomas 1959) continue to be a key interest for current researchers (cf. Duggan 2018). Smaller quantities of this pottery were discovered at a number of other sites across SW Britain and Ireland, during and after Second World War, but none have matched Tintagel. This material represents the largest volume of imported late Roman amphorae to have been recorded from an elite site in Western Britain, with more fine wares recorded at Tintagel than anywhere else in Britain (Duggan 2018).

Such a remarkable discovery demands a special explanation – why Tintagel? It represents significant contact with a very distant Mediterranean world at a time when the late Western Roman Empire was in freefall and being transformed (cf Wickham 2010; Hodges 2016). Both the amphorae and fine dining dishes, were commonplace across the late classical world of the Mediterranean spreading Roman culinary tastes (olive oil, wine, fish sauce) and dining etiquette, but these were not everyday items in Late Roman and post-Roman Britain. Their appearance at the site dates broadly to mid to late 5th to early 6th centuries AD – c. 475 to 550 AD. The pots would have arrived by boats, transported by sea going vessels which linked distant places in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and the Atlantic seaboard via complex maritime routes and, we presume, trading networks to Tintagel (see Duggan 2018). The character of that trade is elusive to pin down and is likely to have been more than just economic (cf. Wooding 1996). Tin, its control and circulation, rather than its extraction, kept connections alive in the late Roman Empire and this may have been a main driver for contact particularly if Tintagel acted as a major gathering place of prestige networks and hosted an elite community. North Cornwall is however not tin country but Tintagel's remoteness and coastal position is likely to have been key in its emergence as a special place, commanding the seaways along the north coast and Bristol channel (Thomas 1988c).

Tintagel's complexities and evolving archaeological stories

Radford's work at Tintagel was pivotal in promoting a major early medieval phase for the site, but the excavations were not comprehensively published. New excavations by the University of Glasgow in the 1990s brought modern excavation techniques targeting well preserved layers from buried sequences within the buildings (revisiting Radford's Site C in particular), stratigraphy was documented and the layers scientifically dated (Barrowman, Batey and Morris 2007). This later campaign, championed by the late Professor Charles Thomas, was conducted in a new interpretative framework. One which promoted a secular rather than spiritual interpretation of the settlement and one with potential regal connections (cf. Burrows 1974; Dark 1985; Nowakowski 2018; Padel 1981, 1984; Thomas 1988b). The Glasgow team looked at a series of building platforms and terraces at Site C, found not only more sherds of imported pottery but stone hearths dated by radiocarbon to the late 5th (cal. AD 415–535) and 6th to 7th centuries AD (cal. AD 560–670). Tintagel for the first time produced hard scientific evidence of chronology and a newer, more nuanced story was in the making, with the hints of longer use-histories of some stone buildings: at site C a stone building had replaced an earlier structure.

For the first time the upstanding stone buildings at Tintagel revealed a deeper time-depth, clear historical complexities and challenges for archaeologists. This realisation was underlined by the

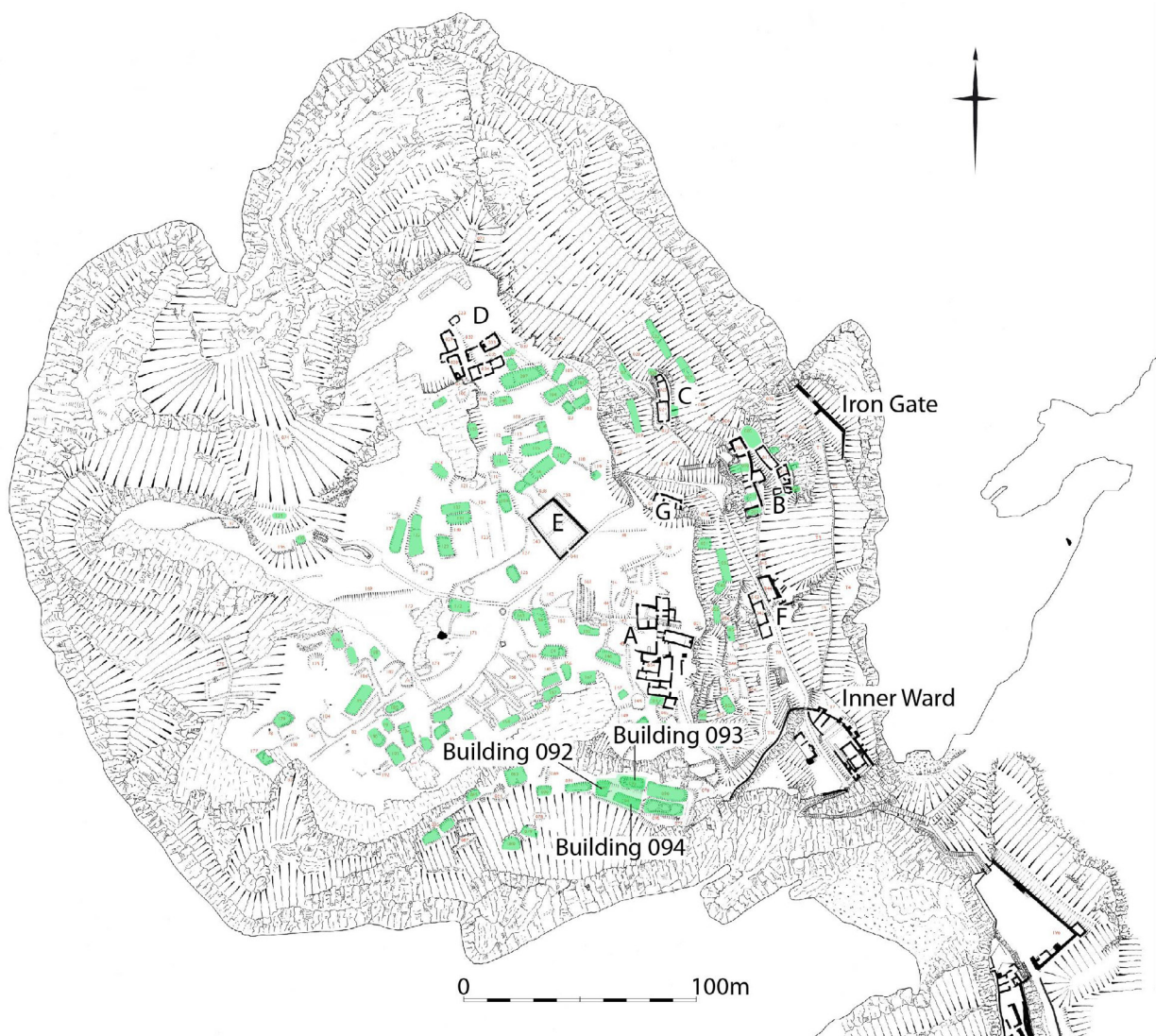


Figure 4: Plan of Tintagel headland showing sites investigated by Radford (upstanding structures in bold sites A to F); Site C investigated by Glasgow University in the 1990s; earthworks surveyed by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments (of England) in the 1980s and interpretations of possible houses and house stances by Historic England in 2015. The TCARP excavations in 2016 and 2017 took place on the southern terrace (also shown as buildings 092, 093 and 094). (Sources: English Heritage; RCHM(E); Barrowman et al 2007; CAU, Historic England (Bowden and Jamieson 2016))

discovery of dozens of other less visible ruins which were revealed after a fire took hold on the headland in the early 1980s. A measured survey of the entire headland was carried out by a team from the Royal Commission of Historical Monuments (England) in 1985 and the sites that Radford had dug years earlier were shown to be surrounded by many other buildings (Thomas 1993; see Figure 4). In 2015, Mark Bowden and Elaine Jamieson of Historic England identified at least 60–80 possible new hut stances or house platforms spread across 6 hectares (Bowden and Jamieson 2016).

These new discoveries of rectangular and/or square (stone) structures or buildings, many terraced into slopes on the Island's eastern and southern sides, display considerable variety. The overall plan of the 'settlement' on the headland, so different from Radford's time, is remarkable in its scale. It shows the detail of a major settlement completely unique and unmatched on any coastal or indeed inland site in



Figure 5: Digital plan of excavations on the southern terrace at Tintagel (Shadow Tor studio, Looe, Cornwall for the TCARP project). The robust walls of the 3 stone buildings are captured with the dark soils of the middens showing clearly along the southern edge of the terrace underlying a substantial stone wall along the bottom of the image (© CAU and English Heritage)

south-western Britain. Tintagel has a more varied history than previous archaeologists and medieval scholars had ever imagined.

TCARP – new excavations - and new stories

The Tintagel Castle Archaeological Research Project (TCARP) is a programme of new archaeological fieldwork. Funded by English Heritage, the principal aim is to enhance existing knowledge (Greaney this volume). A key objective has been to find and dig a complete building of early medieval date (see below). For this the project has examined areas of the headland which have never been explored before.

Two areas were selected and small trenches were opened up in 2016 (Nowakowski and Gossip 2017). The following year the team returned to concentrate on the southern terrace to explore a suite of stone buildings, earthworks captured by the 1985 survey (see above and Figure 4).

On the southern terrace the stone walls of three large rectangular buildings of a complex were revealed in plan (Figure 5). Two long parallel rectangular buildings occupied the upper and lower zones of the terrace and were separated by a passageway. A third building was built across the width of the terrace, its end wall built into and against the base of a cliff face. The entire complex was buried under a dense mass of building stone – structural material which had collapsed and tumbled from the upper walls of the buildings. The whole complex had clearly fallen into ruin after abandonment. A handful of 11th to



Figure 6: Day 28 10 August 2017. Looking east over Building 093 on the excavations on the southern terrace at Tintagel (101_0757 ©J Nowakowski for CAU)

12th-century pottery from the floor surfaces in the upper and lower buildings suggested that this had occurred before the construction of the medieval castle in the 13th century.

What was staggering to learn was that the buildings had only been built partly on the natural underlying bedrock, their foundations rested largely on soft material and that for the most part, the entire southern terrace was made ground. This soft material was formed of deep layers of stone rubble, slate, mixed with soil which contained many finds. The front of the terrace was capped by a massive stone wall, itself built upon a series of



Figure 7: Tracie and the bar lug. A large part of a well-preserved bar lug pot was found inside one of the buildings under a slate floor. A first for Tintagel! This distinctive type of pot with its ugly raised ears (lugs) is not a Mediterranean import but distinctively Cornish. Dating from at least the 7th century AD it gives us tantalising evidence of 7th to 9th centuries at Tintagel (Photo: J. Gossip for CAU)

organic-rich and compacted middens. These contained large quantities of pot sherds (imported wares), small fragments of fine glass (from imported drinking vessels), some metalwork (including many fragments of iron knives), notched slates, amphora stoppers, ancient plant remains, animal bones and charcoal wood chips.

The upper building (the largest) with walls standing up to 1 metre high and 1 metre wide had two rooms; the principal room accessed by an off-centre doorway via an external flight of slate steps, the smaller room (an annex and later addition) via a doorway in the western gable wall. The room interiors were surprisingly very clean. The annex room was floored with worn flagstones (Figure 6).



Figure 8: John cleaning up the slate sill in the southern wall of building 094 on the lower part of the southern terrace. Finding hand written words scratched onto the sill was a major discovery of the 2017 excavations at Tintagel
(Photo: © J Nowakowski for CAU Day 25, 7 August 2017)

The excavation of the southern terrace and the detailed histories of these buildings is currently being written up for publication (Nowakowski *et al.* in preparation). The southern terrace has considerable structural and stratigraphic complexity: surviving sections of an earlier building was found in the lower part of the terrace. This was where most of the finds were recovered from the middens. Radiocarbon dates for the middens showed that they were made in the mid- 5th century AD (Bayliss and Nowakowski in prep.). The middens contained animal bone – pig, cattle, horse, even a few fish bones – all of which so rarely survive on south western sites. With signs of butchery and evidence that whole animal carcasses had at one time been disposed, this key discovery potentially represents gatherings with feasting and consumption on a marked scale (Polydora Baker pers. comm.).



Figure 9: Happy diggers on the TCARP project – sometimes the sun shone on the southern terrace with a fabulous view up coast. Excavations create memorable experiences and excitement for a team (Photo: J. Nowakowski for CAU)

Amongst some of the many surprises revealed by TCARP's excavation on the southern terrace was the discovery of a bar-lugged vessel (Figure 7). Very distinctive to south-west Britain, and Cornwall in particular, this distinctive baggy native cooking pot is a first for Tintagel as the pottery dates from the 7th to 9th centuries AD (Herring *et al.* 2011); its presence here reveals something going on at Tintagel at a time which had previously been a blank page in terms of Tintagel's known 'documented' history.

Another most remarkable discovery was a large flat slate which had been built into the lower wall along the edge of the southern terrace. Its flat surface was hidden from view by stone blocking (Figure 8) and concealed seven lines of inscribed texts, stylistically dated to the 7th to 8th centuries AD (Michelle Brown, pers. comm.). Its discovery caused great excitement but the management of this had to be handled carefully so that it could be considered by experts – so as to avoid sensational headlines. The stone was removed from site and the texts examined in the months following the excavation. This inscribed stone

is now the second piece of hard evidence for literacy at Tintagel as it joins the *Artognov* stone (which was found in the 1990s excavations, Thomas in Barrowman *et al.* 2007: 192–200). These contribute to a small but intriguing collection of pictorial slates from Tintagel (found during Radford's 1930s work and from excavations in nearby Tintagel Churchyard in the early '90s, Thorpe 1988; Nowakowski and Thomas 1990; 1992). These scribbles provide rare direct connections with the deep past; with their mixture of symbols and Latin and Brythonic names they reveal a highly cultured literate community, a place where British and Latin were spoken, read and written.

In broad summary, at least three distinct chronological events have been identified from our work on the southern terrace: an early building associated with the discard of relatively large quantities of imported pottery and associated food waste in the 5th to 6th centuries AD; some activity in the 7th centuries to 9th centuries AD – the exact character of which is hard to pin down, and then the construction of at least two large stone buildings in the 11th to 12th centuries (Bayliss and Nowakowski in prep.). After this activity, the southern terrace appears to have fallen into neglect, ruination and then total abandonment.

Our work on the southern terrace has added further significant time dimension to existing knowledge about Tintagel's complex historical story. Activity on the headland extends beyond the 5th century AD into the 7th and later centuries. This new information stares into the current gap of what is going on at Tintagel in the centuries after the 6th century and before the appearance of Earl Richard's castle in the 13th century. This opens up intriguing questions about the period before the absorption of the ancient lands of Dumnonia by the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex in the 8th and 9th centuries.

As our detailed post excavation work continues it is the TCARP team's first-hand experience of digging at Tintagel which is our focus here. The stories shared by our team show how much the experience made deep impressions and complements those shared by the project at St Piran's Oratory (see below).

Digging at Tintagel – how goes it?

Ancient doodles discovered on windowsill at Tintagel Castle is evidence of 'King Arthur's court' (Singh 2018)

There is always a danger that the press will have their own take on new archaeological results and none more so than when new results from Tintagel emerge, particularly when it involves ancient writing (see above). But setting aside the exciting news of the stone sill, we can consider the impact of seeing intact stone walls of major buildings which have been hidden from view for centuries. Their discovery was an altogether visceral and grounding experience which galvanised and inspired the team. Their excavation required robust fitness with sheer physical effort to dig away and hand remove masses of stone rubble to reveal this buried archaeology. Two key experiences were learnt: a) that the southern terrace is an extraordinary and challenging location on which to build anything, and b) while the southern terrace may have been beautiful baked in sunshine on a hot summer's day (Figure 9), it's an exposed, unforgiving and inhospitable place when the weather turns.

Having spent 3 weeks on the island, battling miserable storms, sweltering heat and a truly wearisome daily climb up to the thing, I also feel I've gained an insight into what life was like for inhabitants of the island whom we studied. (Will, volunteer)

Digging at Tintagel is physically demanding, there is little doubt that it is a difficult place to work logistically and practically. The team removed masses of stone rubble across a large part of the southern terrace to reveal solid buried archaeology. This experience in an exposed and unsheltered part of the headland allows us to reflect on the sheer amount of investment and organisation which had to be

mustered in the first place in order to create a terrace and then quarry the stone and then actually build the buildings. Deep, massive dumps of large and medium-sized slate rubble were exposed and removed from under the tough maritime sward across the whole of the excavation trench we opened up on the southern terrace. These stone dumps were the upper walls of the buildings which had collapsed once the buildings were abandoned. We estimated that at least 350–400 cubic volume of spoil was removed by hand from an area 290m² over 5 weeks in 2017. (This has now all been replaced as the site was backfilled in the autumn.)

The discovery of robust lower stone walls of at least three buildings on the southern terrace not only exceeded expectations but gave the project a real solid foothold, a tangible experience of uncovering something lost and then found. The entire site was visually impressive and, importantly, intellectually accessible. These stone buildings emerged from what had previously been seen as a 'natural' piece of the headland. How have these ruins so solid and robust get overlooked? The shared excitement was palpable and many of the team did not want to stop digging even after long spells of excavating in less than salubrious weather. With the daily unearthing, removing of spoil, stone, and overall digging, the entire venture was a team success in terms of shared experience and, of course, as an evolving spectacle.

The opportunity and engagement

The TCARP team were a small professional team of archaeologists from CAU working with over willing 40 volunteers – many experienced in excavation. Importantly the work has provided opportunities which have involved the local and wider community, including members of Cornwall Archaeology Society as well as others who have worked with us on various community archaeology ventures across the county and indeed welcoming some international volunteers. Everyone felt the privilege of the opportunity and access for digging at such a world famous and iconic site.

Cathy, our Canadian volunteer, wrote:

To be asked to dig at such a famous spot with so much archaeological history was mind stopping. It was without a doubt two of the best summers I have spent since I discovered archaeology. I changed my flights twice to be able to join you. My first impression of the site with all the turf still on was one of awe. Standing on the edge of the cliff overlooking the surf with nothing in sight but ocean was very impressive. When I think of Tintagel it always brings a smile. The wind and sun and crashing of the surf was a welcome change from my hectic life. However, the rain (forcing me to wear a bucket on my head) not so much. But it was merely a tiny blot on the whole experience. Members of the team were amazing with lots of teaching moments. Discussion of what each discovery could be and imagining people living and working with the artefacts was wonderful even if the ideas were squashed by Carl telling us what the tiniest bits actually were.

Margaret, a retired geologist, said:

It must have been hard to manage such a large and varied team of volunteers on such a world-famous site. We were a very varied crew ranging from pharmacists to landscapers, from caterers to lecturers, and many of us were of retirement age. It was a physically demanding site but we knew that before we started. We were inspired by the opportunity to dig on such an important site, so rich in finds, and to follow up on an area of already proven archaeology from the trial trenches of the previous dig [in 2016].

The professional diggers were all very helpful, enabling those of us who were novices to learn a huge amount over the five weeks. A great team atmosphere developed, which triumphed over the sometimes-dreadful weather.

The experience was totally immersive, allowing our imaginations to be set alive. For Sarah, discovering and handling the finds was both remarkable and intellectually enlightening:

I'd say the biggest thing that I took away from the experience was the way that the team brought the site to life for me. On one of my first days on the dig, I remember finding a little chip of red pottery, which I passed to Benji who told me it was Phocaea ware - at first this meant nothing to me but, as he explained where it would have come from and how valuable it would have been, it suddenly created this completely animated scene for me. I could imagine the Phocaea sailors arriving on the beach below us and how exotic they would have looked to the local people helping to unload their ships and I could picture the person who had been carrying the dish my chip came from and how annoyed they must have been when they perhaps dropped it. I think it brought a human presence back to the ruins and it felt like a huge honour to have such a direct contact with the people who had been living and working at Tintagel so long ago.

Meredith, our American archaeologist said:

My own experience on the site was incredible. As my PhD project concerns the connections between the Mediterranean and the coastal Celtic lands, it was thrilling to unearth Roman glass and Mediterranean pottery and to hold in my hands direct evidence of trade between Britain and the Mediterranean. I also found a tremendous amount of delight while I was digging in trying to determine the floor plan and the purpose for each room we excavated. Of course, doing this 6 days a week, all day, for 2 weeks, I sometimes let my imagination get the best of me, but it was fun imagining what kinds of parties and gatherings were hosted and the kinds of stories that were told and fights that occurred in the buildings we excavated.

For Tracie it was such an exciting time, particularly as she made one of the most surprising discoveries in 2017 (Figure 7).

Then digging down and finding walls!!! What excitement! And me finding two tiny fragments of blue/green glass.... Carl said Roman! they were beautiful, very fine. Then I started to find amphora.... then suddenly I realised I had found something a bit different to all the amphora I had found..... As I gently revealed more and more the curve grew and grew! And then this strange lump appeared !!what was this, Jackie came over and seemed to get quietly excited! ... sure enough after very careful digging..... a bar lug.... the lug was intact.....I was filmed talking about this fabulous find and I think I was so amazed and excited that I probably sounded like an over excited school girl!...but I was!!!

Several of the team quickly made connections and this active engagement with the daily discoveries has to be one of the most rewarding parts of the project.

Richard said:

I was struck by the contrast between the massive stone foundations revealed at Tintagel and the equally impressive, but completely different, buildings unearthed at the high-status Anglo-Saxon 'royal vill' site at Lyminge, Kent, where I took part in the excavations led by Gabor Thomas of the University of Reading between 2012 to 2014. To begin with,

whereas Tintagel is located on a steeply-sloping cliff, exposed to all weathers, Lyminge is set in a sheltered river valley, surrounded by farmland. At Lyminge in 2012 we excavated a huge timber hall of post-in-trench construction, 21 metres long by 8.5 metres wide and in 2014 another almost as large (21 metres x 8.2 metres). These were associated with



Figure 10: Steve, Barbara and Zoe talked to thousands of visitors during the 2017 excavations on the southern terrace at Tintagel (Photo: J Nowakowski for CAU)

several smaller halls and three sunken-featured buildings - all were dated to the 5th, 6th or early 7th centuries. At Lyminge the halls were of timber, of which nothing survives but the wall trenches containing the ghosts of 'paired plank' walling, with pairs of deep post holes for the opposed entrances midway along the buildings. Both Tintagel and Lyminge produced fine vessel glass. The pottery at Lyminge was mainly contemporary Anglo-Saxon, with some residual Roman pottery - the unique assemblage of imported pottery at Tintagel is another significant difference between the two sites.

Barbara, who spent much of her time talking to visitors, continued:

I was prompted by the volume of interest being displayed to find the most memorable and accessible way of presenting the facts and information associated with the dig. One fact stood out like a shining beacon. Tintagel had acted as key link in a vast maritime trading network, stretching from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, and north along the western English coast as far as Scotland and Ireland. The high status of the

pottery found on the site, and the generously proportioned building cascading down one side of the island - and facing southwards with a fine view of incoming ships - argued that this was no minor way station but a major trading centre, overseen by a local chieftain or king, enjoying fine dining on exquisite tableware imported from the Middle East and distinctive glassware from the South of France. Cornwall was far from an isolated backwater, inward-looking and insignificant. It played an important role on the world stage which is not generally recognised or flagged up.

Telling stories – challenging perceptions

Presenting an excavation can be challenging as it is very different from presenting an archaeological site which is a set of ruins. Here, at Tintagel, on the southern terrace, we had solid archaeology to share with the crowds of visitors as they roamed around the scattered groups of upstanding ruins on the wider headland. How do these two experiences come together and how to explain to the visitors what it all means? The fact that the buildings we were revealing had been constructed on such a rocky exposed headland and, were somehow mysteriously lost and then found, nudged the team and curious visitors alike, to think about a deeper sense of historical time. Many visitors were simply astonished that more ruins could be revealed on the headland. The presence of so much imported pottery also clearly surprised many. Combined, these revelations contributed towards some gradual understanding of the underlying complexity of Tintagel – a major coastal headland bursting with more ruins than can actually be seen. And indeed, finding structures – robust solid buildings representing such ancient ruins – is a palpable experience especially as these may confound expectations about the Early Middle Ages as a period when the popular perception was that most people lived in hovels.

Digging at Tintagel in full public gaze can be an overwhelming experience – the team and the excavation were constantly on show. The management of this has to be handled carefully but all the team soon became fully aware of expectations of the public and became very adept and authoritative at answering their questions. Regular updates on what was emerging on the excavations were given by the supervisors. Some members of the team were happy to rotate from digging duties and be part of the daily welcoming committee and talk to the curious visitors (Figure 10). The custodian's hut on the island, where all the finds were processed and records kept (our only shelter from the rain and crowds), was the main drop in place for our specialist team. Hundreds of visitors passed by on a daily basis and in order to maintain work on the finds, members of the team talked to the visitors at appointed times throughout each working day. Down in the haven, a couple of the team worked on the floatation tank which was set up to process the soil samples. People were very curious and were fascinated by the method of wet-sieving soil to recover ancient seed remains and bits of charred wood.

Outreach was a key tool of the TCARP project and during our fieldwork the team not only talked to thousands of visitors, visiting groups and school children, but we also shared information on social media. With over one thousand likes on the TCARP Facebook page, we spread news of the work as it was happening globally and this was a good way of keeping those visitors who had actually visited the site up to date with the progress of the excavations (see below). The project also featured in two television documentaries in 2017 and 2018 – the second reaching a global audience when it was broadcast in the United States in March 2019.

Strangely, apart from the world press (see the Telegraph headline above), few of the visitors our excavation team met were 'totally wedded to the Arthurian myths' said Steve. 'Visitors wanted in the main to know 'what we were doing' and 'only one person said they had "no interest if it didn't involve Arthur'. Steve recalls:

Everyone asked 'What have you found?' and whilst I think they were wanting tales of coins, gold and silver, I told them about pottery, wine and olive oil and then, slate floors and walls

2m thick. Most were astounded that we were finding artefacts from Turkey, Africa and Spain. There were a few people who came just to see the excavation. Two of these came from New Zealand and it made their holiday when Jackie invited them to go down to the excavation for a closer look. They still follow TCARP and regularly comment on Facebook.

We could conclude that King Arthur is a mere distraction and that while for some tourists King Arthur and Tintagel were synonymous, in our experience this was not wholly the case. What visitors appeared to be more fascinated about was the hard evidence in the form of such exotica on this remote Cornish headland: the broken pieces of large storage vessels (amphorae), the sharp fragments of hard-fired deep red fine dining dishes and bowls, the fragments of finely decorated glass drinking vessels. It was the implications of their presence at Tintagel as the direct evidence for contact between Tintagel and far-flung distant places in the late Roman Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds that fascinated most people. These insights allowed the team and visitors to see the site in a new way – sparking off excited queries about exotic goods, cultural contacts, who was involved and the general surprise that Tintagel (and so Cornwall, but as the ancient kingdom of Dumnonia in the 5th and 6th centuries) was not some cultural backwater but well-connected to a wider world.

As Chris on the team said:

The Dark Ages certainly did not describe what we found. It seems the life of the people who lived on the island during 5th and 6th centuries enjoyed a rich and varied diet, used exotic and high-class glass and tableware from the Mediterranean. They thrived on the imports and trade from far away and it appeared to be the antithesis to The Dark Ages.



Figure 11: The earliest known photo of the Oratory ruins, late 19th century (Source: Royal Institution of Cornwall)

Uncovering St Piran's Oratory - An iconic Cornish chapel

A saint's cult rediscovered

St Piran's Oratory, an early medieval stone building buried under the sand dunes at Gear Sands, Perranporth, on the north coast of Cornwall, became a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1929 (Figure 11). It was discovered in the early 19th century when it was also excavated. Listed on Historic England's *Heritage at Risk* register in 2011, the building has become the focus of a community archaeology project led by the St Piran's Trust, who also manage the site (Carter 2001). The St Piran's Trust is a non-profit charitable trust committed to the conservation and interpretation of the historic sites associated with the early medieval figure: St Piran. The site has a special place in Cornish history: a major cult developed around St Piran and this site in the later medieval period (cf. Padel 2002; Orme 2000: 220–223; cf Turner 2006).

The first definitive reference to the Oratory may be dated to 1586, when it is noted by William Camden in his work *Britannia* which was published much later in the early 18th century (Camden 1610). Little is historically recorded for the subsequent three centuries. In the 19th century, the ruined walls, considered to be the 'buried church' of St Piran, were revealed beneath the shifting sands. Writing in 1905, the historian Thurstan C. Peter noted that '*an old man called Jenkin observed the tops of the walls very early in the last century*'. In 1817, when Gilbert wrote *An Historical Survey of the County of Cornwall*, the two end walls were partly visible. Excavation to reveal the entire structure was carried out in 1835, when sand was dug out of the chapel interior by Truro businessman, William Michell. An article contributed by William Haslam, then curate of Perranzabuloe, to the national *Archaeological Journal* of 1845, adds further information about how the Oratory fared and looked after Michell's excavation.

In the year 1835 the sand was removed from the ancient edifice, and once more the oratory of St Piran stood forth in its original condition, after a lapse of many centuries. It was then in as perfect a state as when it was forsaken and left to be overwhelmed. The doorways, and the apertures in the walls, had been closed up with stone, and the roof removed, but in other respects the building appeared to have been left in its original condition.

But sadly, no sooner had the Oratory been exposed than it began to suffer the effects of its harsh and isolated environment (Figure 11). Carved stone heads found embedded in the original door arch were stolen, with the building appearing 'wantonly injured; within three days of the discovery being announced, the doorway was destroyed' (Haslam 1845: 228).

Practical conservation of the Oratory remained a common anxiety throughout the 19th century. Sand dunes regularly inundated the building with the result that the external pressure and weight of the shifting sands effected a detrimental effect on the medieval walls, forcing them out of perpendicular (Collins 1910: 391). These concerns ultimately led to the construction of a protective concrete shell in 1910 (Figure 12). Although this successfully protected the Oratory, opinions were divided as revealed in this disparaging commentary by Dr Dexter at the time:

if the buried church could speak, she would complain bitterly of the writers who have misunderstood her, of the trippers who have robbed her, of the Church that sold her, and of the enthusiasts who have entombed her in that hideous cement structure, which suggests a reservoir, a motor garage, an aerodrome, a picture palace, anything - except a church (Dexter 1922).

While the concrete shell protected the physical structure of the Oratory from the detrimental weight of the surrounding sand (as it continues to do today), its construction entailed extensive excavation of ground levels inside and outside the building: in the process intact archaeological layers, which included human burials, were destroyed, with little or no record.

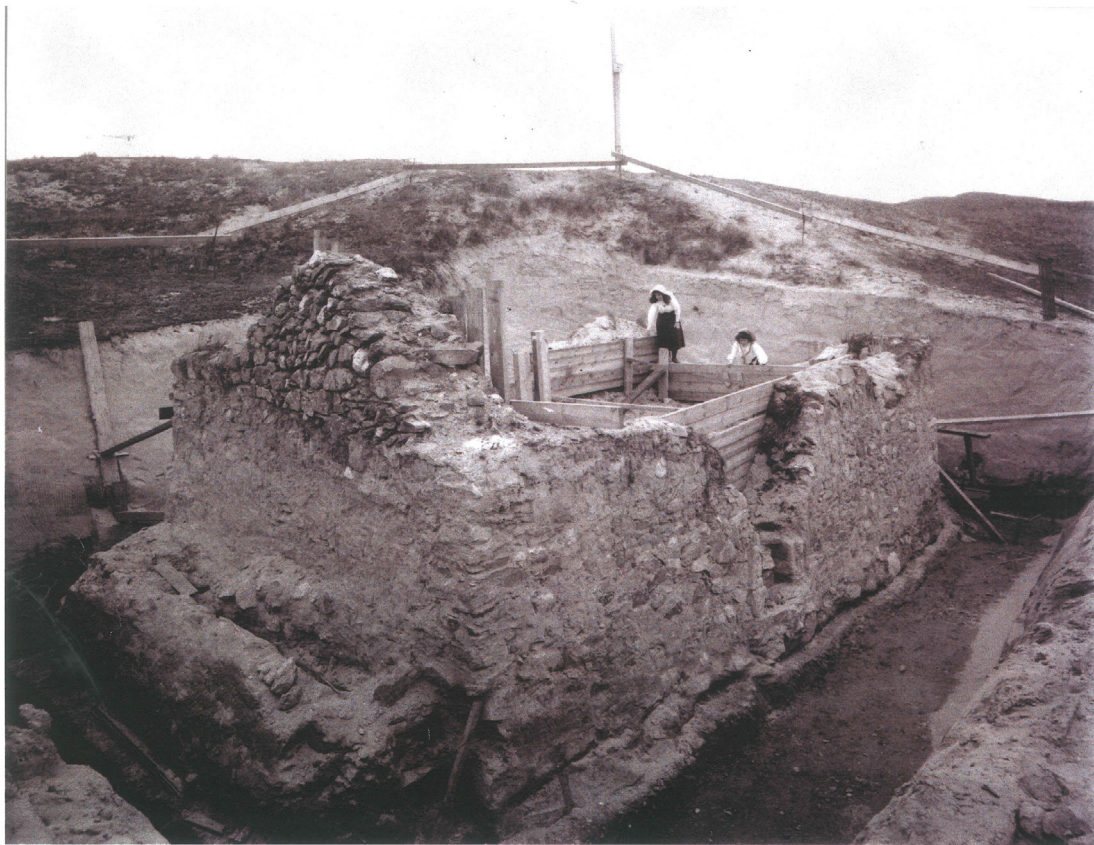


Figure 12: St Piran's Oratory. Construction of the 'concrete shell' 1910 (Source: Royal Institution of Cornwall)

As the image of St Piran as a Cornish icon and adopted 'national' saint continued to gain status throughout the middle decades of the 20th century, the Oratory building and its immediate surroundings became a place of pilgrimage. This has become an annual fixture for a re-enactment of the saint's arrival across the sea (legend tells us that St Piran arrived on a millstone from Ireland), and his landing on the beach, which culminates in a procession to St Piran's Cross (during religious holidays) and particularly on St Piran's Day (5 March) (Preston-Jones 2018: 160). The monument, however, continued to be vulnerable to localised flooding, vandalism and general neglect and degradation. Local concerns led to radical action by the Department of the Environment.

In 1980, believing it to be the only viable and affordable option to conserve the structure from further damage, the protective concrete structure was partially demolished and the Oratory was buried under an artificial sand dune. A stone inscribed with a dedication to St Piran was placed upon the mound, and despite being hidden from view, the site remained a focus for all those interested in St Piran. By this time St Piran had become Cornwall's adopted patron saint (or at least the Patron Saint of Tinnars) and a symbol of political and regional identity with the Oratory at its core. As the popular desire to understand and gain more direct contact with the Oratory grew in momentum, a campaign was launched by a local group, *The St Piran's Trust*, to see the Oratory re-excavated and re-exposed. Cornwall Archaeological Unit were commissioned to develop and carry out a community project which has run from 2014.

The plan to re-excavate was beset with problems: practical access was difficult (impossible by car), the whole area was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation. Any excavation required hard-won Natural England consent and Scheduled Monument Consent from Historic England. The land around the Oratory was known to flood every winter as a result of the rising



Figure 13: Uncovering St Piran's Oratory, 14 February 2014 (Photo: J Gossip for CAU)

water table; historic photos show that flooding had been a seasonal problem since at least the late 19th century. It was not difficult to find willing participants, and working with shovels, buckets and barrows, a volunteer team of up to 80 struggled through all weathers to dig down to the bottom of the Oratory, allowing its first ever detailed survey: a heroic effort all round.

Despite its proximity to the popular beaches of Perranporth and the sprawl of the adjacent holiday park, the site of St Piran's oratory has an air of isolation, lying adrift in an alien-looking landscape of grass covered hillocks and craters, the result of shifting sand dunes and mining spoil heaps. In February 2014 a large volunteer workforce started excavations of the oratory (Figure 13). The principal task seemed daunting – the entire monument had been consumed by a massive sand dune and the team had to dug hard and remove tons of the compacted layers of sand. When the team arrived to start digging on a wet and blustery February day all that marked the location of the buried structure was the commemorative stone inscribed:

St Piran, dedicated to the Glory of God and in memory of St Piran, Irish Missionary and Patron Saint of Tinnars who came to Cornwall in the 6th century'. Beneath this stone is buried the Oratory which bears his name, erected on the site hallowed by his prayers.

The stone had been placed at the site in the 1980s during its reburial (see above).

On the face of it this appears to tell us all we needed to know. But what did the team know about the building that is the oratory, or indeed St Piran himself, before the site's re-excavation? Much has been written and most past commentary has grown from the rediscovery of the Oratory in 1835, making the true story of this building and its association with a legendary Cornish saint difficult to unravel.

Most 19th and 20th-century accounts tell us that the Oratory is the oldest four-walled Christian building in mainland Britain, built in the 6th century by St Piran, an Irish missionary who became the patron saint of tanners, and the most important saint in Cornwall. St Piran was described as being very tall, lived to be 200, could converse with animals and liked a drink. As the main site in Cornwall associated with St Piran there were claims that the Oratory contained his body (his being one of three headless skeletons reputedly excavated in 1835, now lost). It is not clear when the chapel was first given the title oratory, but it is not referred to as this until after its rediscovery.

The first recorded mention of the saint and his association with the site is much later than 6th century AD. This is AD 960, found in the survival of a rare 10th-century charter made by King Edgar which recorded a grant of land at Tywarnhayle in 'Perranzabuloe' (Piran in the Sands) (Preston-Jones 2018: 161). This and the name 'Lanpiran', recorded in Domesday in 1086, suggest the presence of an enclosed Christian complex or cemetery which may have included the Oratory, and the later parish church to the north-east, or both (Cole 2007; Preston-Jones 2018). Nicholas Orme tells us that Gilbert Hunter Double's (Antiquarian and vicar of Wendron 1880–1945) extensive researches on the lives of the 'Celtic' saints claim to tell the story of the arrival of Christianity from Ireland, Wales and Brittany in the centuries after the Romans (Orme 2000: 16). But unlike St Samson, a 6th-century Cornish saint whose 'Life' is written in the 7th century, the Life of St Piran was not written until the 12th or 13th century, either by a Cornish cleric or by someone based at Exeter cathedral (Orme 2000: 220). The writer of his Life believes St Piran to be the same historical figure as St Cíarán of Saighir (County Offaly) and consequently adopts this life as that of St Piran. He is seen, along with the other saints in the early Christian church, as a hero, a bringer of Christianity from a distant land. The legend tells us that he travelled to Cornwall across the sea on a millstone and built a church at the spot where he landed – considered to be on the coastal belt on Perran sands. The truth is more likely to be that St Piran is a reflection of Christianity as seen by the medieval writer in the 12th to 13th centuries and as there is absolutely no firm evidence for St Piran's origins in Ireland, he may have been an important Cornish Christian cleric or nobleman (Orme 2000: 220–223). The cult of St Piran gained wider support in the later medieval period and by the later 18th century he was honoured by the Cornish tin miners (Orme 2000: 223). He was adopted in the mid-19th century as the patron saint of Cornwall, the St Piran's flag of a white cross on a black background, presumably stemming from this association with Cornish mining, is today the most visible symbol of modern Cornish identity.

The Oratory building – its rediscovery and re-entry into modern times

Despite being accessible for 140 years neither the building nor its immediate surroundings had been subject to detailed investigation beyond the 19th century surveys. The uncovering of the Oratory once again has enabled the use of modern survey methods, the result being that we can now discuss the building and its origins with more certainty.

John Allan, the architectural historian working for the project, carried out analysis of the building and has arrived at a number of conclusions which point towards a construction several centuries later than the presumed 6th century date. He concludes that although heavily patched and in places rebuilt, the Oratory is probably all of one period. The cable-moulded frame of the doorway, and its former three projecting stone heads, are the Oratory's most datable characteristic features of Cornwall's Norman architecture, most usually seen in the decoration on fonts. It is also the case that, so far, no convincing pre-Norman fabric has been identified in any standing churches in Cornwall, or in Devon west of Exeter. A likely explanation is that there was no active tradition of church building in stone in this region in the pre-Norman period and that unless this is a unique survivor, the Oratory structure is probably of Norman date (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Uncovering St Piran's Oratory November 2014 – Overhead the oratory and the concrete shell (Photo: J Gossip for CAU)



Figure 15: Uncovering St Piran's Oratory March 2014 (Photo: J Gossip for CAU)

On the basis of these results the Oratory could simply be regarded as a single-phase Norman chapel, but there remain tantalising hints of more ancient origins. During the 2014 re-excavation twelve burials were discovered lying immediately to the north-west of the Oratory, high in the sand dune. The skeletons, excavated by trained volunteers, comprised the remains of two adult women and ten children, buried in the sand (Figure 17). Most had been laid to rest in the traditional Christian style, stretched on their backs with their heads at the western end of sand-cut graves and wrapped in shrouds – although one, a child aged around four years old, had been placed on its right side in a semi-crouched position, aligned almost north-south, for reasons unknown. The discovery of human remains was not unexpected as the Victorian excavations and visitor accounts record the presence of skeletons and bones both in and around the Oratory, but for the first time, our new project has employed scientific (radiocarbon) dating techniques. Samples from two of the child skeletons, including the crouched burial, returned radiocarbon dates from the 8th or 9th centuries AD. These dates confirm the presence of Christian burial two or three hundred years *before* construction of the Oratory.

The St Piran's team experience

As discussed, the archaeological facts uncovered during the recent archaeological project at St Piran's oratory has shown that the results of re-evaluating the structure of the building, once it had been uncovered again, varies significantly from the Dark Age stories and myth which have grown up around the site. But to what extent does the separation of fact from fiction matter to the individuals involved in the archaeological project to promote this iconic Cornish site? How much do they care if St Piran was a real historic figure, if he came from Ireland or if he lived to be 200?



Figure 16: Uncovering St Piran's Oratory – team in the oratory December 2014 (Photo: J Gossip for CAU)



Figure 17: Excavating human burials at St Piran's Oratory (Photo: J Gossip for CAU)

Like the volunteers on the Tintagel project, the 'Uncovering St Piran's Oratory' team had a varied demographic, individuals from diverse backgrounds but with shared interests and aims. Some knew the Oratory and the story of St Piran well, perhaps remembering how they celebrated his life every 5 March whilst at primary school, or being fiercely proud of the flag and what it meant to them to be Cornish.

Others involved knew nothing of the Oratory, or its saint, and saw the project simply as an opportunity for 'hands on' participation in archaeology, a discipline which many had previously felt was inaccessible.

With involvement came a sense of group effort and community, of coming together for a shared objective (Figures 15 and 16).

After the fieldwork participants were asked what the Oratory and their involvement in its rediscovery meant to them. Some responded with a sentence or two, some with paragraphs, others with poems. Many remembered how they relished the opportunity to be involved at a practical level and had used the project as a springboard to either further study or a route into the profession. One volunteer commented on the excavation being 'rather life changing' and 'instrumental in helping to shape my archaeological career, an educational experience for me' – another as 'inspiring' and 'truly special' and how the site and the opportunity to take part 'meant the world to them'. They talked of 'being part of the team' and the chance 'to get to know fellow archaeologists and those with an interest in history', of 'being welcomed as a newcomer to the county - how the project led to being involved in other projects, linking-up with more and more interesting people. To me the oratory means opportunity'.

Others remember the project for the way it enabled them to make connections with people from their past, completely coincidentally:

The stand out thing for me was connecting with a distant relative. She was related to the granddad who died 15 years before I was born. During our conversations amongst the sandy spoil heaps it emerged that the uncle of another digger served on the same ship attacked by Japanese Air Force. His uncle died in action but my granddad survived.

Speaking candidly, the same volunteer revealed how involvement in the project helped them recover from mental illness: 'the first steps I took to get back out into the real world after a year of being a recluse and leading on to a career in professional archaeology....it is amazing what opportunities community archaeology brings'.

The volunteer who has always been the chief protagonist in the re-excavation of the Oratory spoke in language both poetic and heavy with religious connotation, almost as prayer:

the Oratory is the root of the Cornish nation. It is the beginning with no end....it is the branches that stretch around the world. It is St Piran and his people who now carry his black and white flag with great pride. The Oratory is ancient and now frail, yet it still stands defiantly like a bold warrior in the wild sands. The winds blow like a bunch of harpies, the rain hammers down and floods the little chapel. The sun bakes it dry. It still endures as a memorial to the hundreds of people who through the centuries have loved lived and died there. The bodies were lovingly buried clustered tightly round their beloved saint. There is no ending, the ashes and flowers for loved ones today are there, as I shall be and many more to come. The Oratory still holds a spiritual peace and is visited by pilgrims of many nationalities and so, there is no ending.

As it has been, so it shall be forever and ever amen.

Older participants in particular had comments rich in local memories which recalled childhood experiences and connected them to their sense of place within the community:

I can recall visiting the oratory as a child in late 1940s and early 1950s. If the wooden door was open, I could get inside its concrete shell to step down into the dark, dank water and feel with my fingertips to squeeze between the rough concrete shell and the irregular stone walls of what we believed to be the oldest chapel in Britain.

Someone had always been there before; there were always flowers on the altar, always signs of love and respect for this hallowed, special place.

They felt a sense of loss when the Oratory was buried, leaving: 'only a mound, a mini-Troy to cover the religious and emotional experiences confined within the jagged, weathered walls.' Involvement in the project was a chance to return to one's own childhood experience and emotions '....and Troy became a ziggurat as we dug away terrace by terrace. It was hard work with Cornish shovels.... splinters of bones were carefully collected, respectful of our ancestors from a more religious past. Eventually we exposed the top of a wall and as we progressed memories flooded back'. This reaction to the process of revealing again what had once been seen as a child and viscerally remembered by sight, touch and smell is very poignant, and even if the sense of historical places and time depth is tad confused, with a mini-Troy (!), it may reveal something more deeper and a connection with the value of local memory. It clearly had made a deep impact of the experience of that place.

A frequent response from the volunteers and visitors to the excavations was how the site of St Piran's Oratory felt poignant and haunting, particularly with reference to the presence of burials and the Oratory's place in an early medieval community. The discovery of burials was partly, though not wholly unexpected, but seeing these burials opened up a small window to a deeper connection to people and our shared humanity which gave a nudge and glimpse to 'a way to envisage life in the early medieval period and how the oratory itself was a nucleus for local people'. The discovery of the bare bones of the skeletons were shocking to some, moving to others (Figure 17):

Most of the work on the skeletons was done by women. I watched experienced mothers brush sand from the children's bones as gently as they had washed their own infants' delicate skins. Younger women lovingly stroked away the grit and saw in the skulls the faces of their own nieces or siblings. We were all moved by this family, buried together, who had sought spiritual and perhaps physical protection from the proximity of St Piran's relics.

A sense of the lost spirituality of this re-exposed building appears to have been a major gain of the project and how it may be brought back into the fold of contemporary daily life.

The relationship between the fact and mythology were perfectly summarised by one volunteer who wrote:

Archaeologists may say that the bent spines of the children were not deformed, but bowed by the pressure of the sand around them. Buildings experts might conclude that the rough walls were erected in the Norman period and not in the 5th or 6th centuries. But I remember the awe of wading into the tomb like space around those walls and the respect and pity we felt for the buried children. The myth will remain. The excavation was cathartic, the emotional response was cleansing and I feel so fortunate to have been involved.

Reflections on doing 'Dark Age' archaeology in Cornwall

Why oh why is king arthur still talked about by serious historians as if he was a historical character? He is a 15th century fictional character whose myth is like a franchise keeping a north cornwall backwater afloat He has nothing to do with tintagel and his name may as well be mickey mouse. Facebook 11 September 2018

In our chapter we have brought together the experiences of two community archaeology projects researching different aspects of early medieval Cornwall. We have shown how both projects generated excitement, provided memorable life experiences, and has emphasised the individual and social benefit and value of community participation. We have also shown how connecting with the past reveals our humanity and also how our involvement in understanding the construction of history, the past, is in our hands. It is a shared enterprise. The one unifying thread is a strong common sense of purpose and the feeling of doing something of value which can be shared widely. The fact that both projects are focused on new research on two major iconic sites is an added bonus helping to instil local pride of the distinctiveness of Cornish archaeological heritage and the chance to have a role in its safeguarding and promotion.

The projects have also given many of the volunteers an opportunity to connect with place and their locality in a very real sense. The opportunities have permitted us all to look again at well-known places with new eyes. At Tintagel, the team were constantly in the public eye and members enjoyed sharing their knowledge of the excavations taking clear pride in the roles that they played. They also experienced, at first hand, what a responsibility it is to be heard and considered as an expert and how history and archaeology never always fit comfortably hand in glove. They learnt that public expectations can be quite sophisticated, genuinely curious, and that people are fascinated to learn that old sites can produce new stories. A similar experience was had during the St Piran's project where a more local audience clearly welcomed back a building, a place once lost, and then (magically) re-found. The teamwork in digging up the heavy sand to reveal again a stone building was epic. Even if the physical structure of St Piran's Oratory is not as early as previous generations have argued, it is still an important Cornish icon and remains a powerful focus for local people who wish to celebrate Cornish identity.

One major result is the shared understanding that in the wider imagination the two sites exist on two slightly different stages: Tintagel with its global reputation and St Piran's oratory with a more local appeal. They are however both part of the rich landscape of the ancient kingdom of Dumnonia and have formative roles in the shaping our understanding of the fabric of the early medieval world.

Clearly a major settlement emerges as a distinctive place effective and significant for some decades in the 5th century AD at Tintagel. Our excavations reveal that rather than falling off the radar, Tintagel continues to be relevant into the 7th centuries and beyond. The historical context of the massive stone buildings revealed on the southern terrace (which date to the pre-Norman period) need now to be considered as they add a new layer of complexity to Tintagel's political significance and social standing. Whether we are looking at a hub of power and the domain of the early medieval Cornish kings throughout the 7th to 10th centuries are still up to scrutiny but the investment, display and power which can be read into the ruins, show these buildings to be unique. These are the discoveries alongside the many broken pieces of imported and exotic pottery that our team came to learn about and share.

The discoveries of human burials at St Piran's Oratory equally reveals the site to have an earlier significant history that perhaps the standing ruin today cannot truly serve to authenticate. The discovery of burials dating to the 8th and 9th centuries AD is very significant, bringing to light that which is not evident at surface and almost impossible to detect in the sand dunes. The true extent of this special landscape is now part of the St Piran's Trust future challenge to ensure its conservation and management in which local communities will have a stake. While the project has not set out to prove his presence at the oratory, St Piran's story hooks us into the distinctive character of the evolving early Christian landscape of western Britain, a land of Saints, chapelries and bold crosses (cf. Turner 2006). These share the attributes of early Christian sites in Wales and Brittany.

The new information gained from both Tintagel and St Piran's Oratory will be written into the new stories we write about the Early Middle Ages. Critically, these add deeper historical insights and knowledge of both sites which to a large degree confirm their special place in understanding something about the distinctive character and personality of western Britain at this period. These are the main things the teams have learnt. Early medieval Cornwall was a place which was open to wider connections and influences where its coastal identity played an important role.

While the figures of Arthur and St Piran will continue to cast long shadows these 'historical' personages will continue to have powerful legitimate place-making roles. Excavations have shown that both sites have much deeper and richer histories, loosening up the constraints of a pre-configured 'Dark Age' expectations. They have been shown to be places with wider and more deeply rooted local connections. These community projects have enhanced both sites with new stories and through the doing of archaeology, the teams have learnt that the making of 'history' is shown as a continuous enterprise and exciting challenge.

Above all, these two projects have also shown how archaeology above all has a key role to play in unravelling our shared cultural heritage of the early medieval world in Cornwall. Any archaeological enterprise offers privileged access to the past and by conducting new work in the spirit of a shared experience these projects have opened opportunities for local groups to get involved in the fashioning of these new stories. It is certainly clear that the historical foundations of both Tintagel and St Piran's Oratory have complexities which grander and simpler narratives have tended to obscure.

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An enormous number of volunteers helped out at the two seasons of work at St Piran's Oratory. They gleefully took on what appeared to be an insurmountable challenge, helping to shift hundreds of tons of sand in all weathers and making lifelong friends along the way. Thanks to them all for making it such a memorable experience and for bringing back to life a forgotten and neglected part of Cornwall's heritage. Special thanks to Sara Rogers, Eileen Carter, Adrian Rodda, Sorchá Madder, Tracie Haslam, Stacey Long, Jo May and Tom Harvey-James for their contributions to this paper. Participants are too many to list here but special thanks to Martin Andrewes and Richard Mikulski for their support during both projects.

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Death and Memory in Fragments: Project Eliseg's Public Archaeology

Howard Williams and Suzanne Evans

The public archaeology of death has frequently focused on the ethics and practices of excavating, displaying and curating human remains and mortuary contexts. Yet the focus of investigation is often restricted to whole, articulated bodies and tangible, complete monuments. Far fewer discussions have tackled the complex challenges of engaging the public with fragmented, partial human remains, ephemeral mortuary material cultures and dislocated funerary monuments. Equally, few studies have tackled the distributed nature of mortuary and memorial traces through their artistic representation and replication. This article addresses the challenges of Project Eliseg's (2010–present) public archaeology when fragmentation, absence and distribution – both temporally and spatially – pervade the mortuary and memorial archaeology under investigation. We address how the public outreach of our fieldwork both succeeded and faced challenges to engage local people with the monument itself, partly because the monument is fragmented in multiple regards and partly because it is not primarily or exclusively in situ, but is instead both materially and conceptually elsewhere within the landscape of Wales and beyond.

Introduction

Carved stone monuments are powerful and diverse traces of early medieval communities' expressions of faith, social identity and political discourse. Furthermore, many have been shown to possess complex biographies of use and reuse over time and down to the present day, becoming central to local, regional and national senses of identity and ownership (Hall 2015). Free-standing stone crosses are rarely found in situ or in context, making those that do seem to remain in their original context of carving and installation a particularly valuable resource for understanding both their creation and subsequent use and reuse down the decades and centuries (Williams *et al.* 2015). Equally, few early medieval stones bear text of a length that their meanings and significance are readily discerned in the present, rendering them windows onto the past through their texts and contexts.

Yet both original landscape context and a striking inscription are distinctive and engaging characteristics of the unique monument known as the Pillar of Eliseg or Eliseg's Pillar (Llantysilio, Denbighshire, Wales) (Figure 1). This early medieval monument is seemingly still located at its original position upon an older mound, and it bears faint traces of a Latin inscription that dates the monument to the early 9th century and speaks about time and across time: replete with claims to the past, and aspirations for the future, by the rulers of the early medieval kingdom of Powys (Edwards 2009; 2013; Williams 2011; Williams *et al.* 2015). The Pillar of Eliseg thus provokes particular consideration in approaching how early medieval stone monuments not only configured death and memory in the past, but how they come to configure senses of place and the past, origin myths and historical narratives for late 20th-/early 21st-century audiences. In this chapter, we explore how the Pillar of Eliseg is both powerful and problematic as a focus of public archaeology, relating specifically to the challenges of engaging the public with its fragmented and distributed multi-period characteristics.

We evaluate and contextualise the fieldwork of a collaborative research project – Project Eliseg¹ – which has sought to rehabilitate the Pillar in academic and public understanding, both in the landscape and in digital environments. In so doing, the challenges and potential of the Pillar of Eliseg offers an intriguing case study from the perspective of public mortuary archaeology: addressing a monument that speaks

¹ <https://projecteliseg.wordpress.com/>

about death and memory both in the past and to present-day audiences (see Giles and Williams 2016; Williams 2018; 2019). The chapter shows how the significance of the Pillar has been enhanced and extended by a range of initiatives and heritage practitioners including those within and beyond Project Eliseg. Yet equally, we argue that the Pillar of Eliseg's mnemonic mutability and efficacy derive from not only its text and landscape context, but also through its fragmentation and distribution across multiple locales. In particular, the chapter places the strengths and weaknesses of Project Eliseg's public engagements in a broader regional and national context.



Figure 1: The Pillar of Eliseg from the south-west. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2016)

The Pillar of Eliseg's biography

To explain the Pillar of Eliseg's many public dimensions today, it is important to briefly outline its character and life-history. The monument today comprises two carved stones: a large rectangular base and a section of the cylindrical cross-shaft inserted into the base. The shaft bears traces of two Latin inscriptions: faint traces of the original early medieval one on its western side, now barely legible, and a second within an incised rectangular border added to the opposite (eastern) side in the late 18th century. In short, the Pillar is a textual monument, but one where the original text is not immediately accessible or comprehensible. The monument is neither readily visited nor explicable to many living in the vicinity or regular visitors from farther afield. This has resulted in restricting interest from locals and visitors alike over the long term. Still, the Pillar has been researched and interpreted for the public via the medium of heritage signs and a Cadw guide book for Valle Crucis Abbey (Edwards 2008).

Until the work by Project Eliseg, the mound upon which the Pillar is positioned was undated, although it was frequently presumed to be prehistoric. The ‘Pillar’ itself is dated by a Latin text, first transcribed when it was still partly legible in the 17th century by antiquary Edwards Lhuyd (Edwards 2009). The inscription claims the Pillar was raised by Cyngen, ruler of Powys, to honour the deeds and military victories of his great-grandfather Eliseg (more accurately ‘Elise’). The fragments are best interpreted as parts of a free-standing round-shafted cross dating to the early 9th century and thus purposefully located on a far-older mound. As a prominent instance of early medieval ‘monument reuse’, the Pillar’s text, form, material and mound combined to assert a dynasty’s illustrious martial and pan-British heritage. Nancy Edwards has postulated that the cross may have had a particular context and audience, perhaps serving as a place of assembly asserting rights to land and history together. It might have even been intended as a place of royal inauguration given its focus on succession and legal language (Edwards 2009; 2013; see also Williams 2011).



Figure 2: View of the Pillar of Eliseg from the south, taken from the entrance to the Summer House built by Trevor Lloyd in the grounds of the ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey. (Photograph: Howard Williams 2016)

The Pillar is thus a composite textual monument with a long and complex biography of use and reuse. Following its prehistoric and early medieval phases, the cross and mound endured together in the landscape. They were incorporated into the Cistercian monastic landscape of Valle Crucis Abbey from the 13th century: the monument’s fame and prominence were such that the valley and the monastery adopted it for their name: the ‘valley of the cross’ (Edwards 2008; 2009; 2013). The cross was clearly revered during these centuries as both ancient and holy, but it was then either pulled down or fell down and broke sometime in the early/mid-17th century and the cross-head was presumably lost or appropriated for use elsewhere at this time. The significance of the text on the broken column was then first recorded by antiquarian scholars (as mentioned above). In the late 18th century, the mound was

dug into and a skeleton found before the cross fragments were re-erected in the original base on top of the mound by local squire Trevor Lloyd. In doing so, Lloyd inscribed the shaft with a second Latin text celebrating his act of restoration. In this state, the ‘Eliseg’s Pillar’ was created to serve as a romantic ruin, and subsequently has once again persisted as an enduring landmark and a visitor attraction, augmented by a fence and accessible past a Ministry of Works sign by the roadside, but one that hardly prompts a close affinity with local people.

The Pillar of Eliseg’s landscape context

The landscape context of the Pillar of Eliseg is also key for understanding its significance past and present. In prehistory, this might have been one of a series of funerary monuments framing movement along the valley’s western side. As a possible early medieval assembly place, it was linked to a network of routes through and out of the Vale of Llangollen. The monument was positioned in a theatrical local setting. It was placed on a mound situated on a south-facing spur that visually controlled its immediate environs. This location can be considered suitable as a gathering place for large numbers of people, supporting Edwards’ (2008) hypothesis that it was an assembly place: a category of site hitherto not firmly located for early medieval Wales. Whilst it was visually ‘hidden’ from afar, the cross was likely to have been positioned in relation to a network of lookout points and thus guarded from all directions (Murrieta-Flores and Williams 2017).



Figure 3: The view looking east from the foot of Velvet Mountain past the Abbey Farm to the ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey and the ruins of Castell Dinas Brân in the distance. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2017)

The monument's landscape context was equally important for its subsequent life-history. During the later Middle Ages, it marked the approach to Valle Crucis Abbey's monastic landscape, and subsequently remained a landmark, even as a mound with toppled cross-fragments between the 17th and 18th centuries. After its restoration by Lloyd, it enjoyed a visual interaction with the summer house and ornamental pond he constructed adjacent to the ruins of Valle Crucis, and thus was visually and spatially tied into this Welsh picturesque landscape (Figure 2). It slowly became part of one of Britain's oldest tourist trails, one of a network of attractions in the Vale of Llangollen (D.H. Evans 2008: 16). Access was made easier following the opening of the Llangollen canal from 1808, then the London–Holyhead road following the 1815 Act of Parliament and finally the Llangollen railway in 1861 (Edwards *et al.* 2015; forthcoming).

As a tourist attraction, the Pillar was not only connected to Valle Crucis Abbey, but also the dominating medieval castle ruins of Castell Dinas Brân, invisible from both Pillar and Valle Crucis but operating in visual interplay with both sites via viewpoints on Velvet Hill and Abbey Farm, immortalized by Turner's painting (D.H. Evans 2008: 17)² (Figure 3). Meanwhile, Llantysilio church, the Horseshoe Falls, and the Chainbridge at Berwyn over the Dee became popular tourist destinations,³ all explored together with the Pillar and abbey via the Llangollen canal itself. In sum, the Pillar has never been engaged with in isolation, but as part of a touristic choreography of the Vale.

Further to the south-east is Llangollen town with its medieval bridge and church of St Collen. On the south-side of the town is Plas Newydd: the home of the famous Ladies of Llangollen who had considerable affinities with Valle Crucis and its ruins.⁴ Other heritage attractions in Llangollen now include the annual International Eisteddfod,⁵ the steam heritage line the Llangollen Railway⁶ and, further down the Vale to the east, the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct takes the canal over the River Dee and is now (as of 2009) designated a World Heritage Site.⁷ From 2011, Valle Crucis and the Pillar became part of the much-extended Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, replete with surviving prehistoric monuments but also industrial remains.⁸

In terms of early medieval monuments in the area, the possible early medieval church site at Corwen (Merioneth) has preserved sculpture in and around it (Edwards 2008: 54; 2013: 377–85), while Llangollen's church might have similarly held a status as an early medieval ecclesiastical centre. Also, the Pillar is frequently juxtaposed in relation to the Mercian frontier works of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke. These two linear earthworks guard the eastern entrance to the Vale: the former regarded as broadly contemporary with Eliseg, the latter perhaps contemporary of Cyngen (see Hill and Worthington 2003; Malim and Hayes 2008; Ray and Bapty 2016). Long-distance walking trails now mark their route: Wat's Dyke Way and the Offa's Dyke Path with the latter departing from the dyke and following the Vale around Eglwyseg Mountain.⁹

Therefore, the Pillar has become a part of a well-recognised, if somewhat ancillary, locus of Welsh heritage tourism and integrated into the Vale's histories and legends. Indeed, as a heritage site and scheduled ancient monument, the Pillar of Eliseg is today closely associated with, albeit demonstratively subordinate to, Valle Crucis Abbey, with which it has long shared a guide book (D.H. Evans 2008). The

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castell_Dinas_Br%C3%A2n

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chain_Bridge_\(Berwyn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chain_Bridge_(Berwyn))

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plas_Newydd,_Llangollen

⁵ <http://international-eisteddfod.co.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.llangollen-railway.co.uk/>

⁷ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1303>

⁸ <http://www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/discovering-the-aonb/>

⁹ https://www.ldwa.org.uk/ldp/members/show_path.php?path_name=Wat%27s+Dyke+Way+Heritage+Trail; [http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/offas-dyke-path.](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/offas-dyke-path)

Pillar is visible, and a short walk, from the abbey ruins and visible from much of the surrounding Nant Eglewseg side-valley running north from the Vale of Llangollen. The Pillar is likewise adjacent to, and accessible from, the A542: a popular touring route for motorists, bikers and cyclists along the Horseshoe Pass and down to join the A4 at Berwyn or Llangollen and can be viewed from many points on the surrounding hills.

It is against these spatial and temporal contexts that Project Eliseg's public outreach and public archaeological dimensions need to be considered. However, while the Pillar is linked to a network of sites, monuments and buildings and it has been augmented and afforded heritage protection and interpretation, equally the monument has remained somewhat disconnected from local identities and affinities and it has not been served by a coherent heritage trail or consistent heritage interpretation. There is no local folklore surrounding the Pillar, and local people interviewed prior to the dig expressed limited appreciation of the monument and relative indifference as to its fate (S. Evans 2009). Moreover, despite information at Valle Crucis Abbey (see below), there were, and remain, multiple challenges to navigating physical access to the Pillar. There is no clear signage, no adequate layby, and no safe footpath to the monument. Cadw's fencing of the mound in 2010 following the first season of excavations offered it further protection by directing visitors away from the favoured eastern approach, which had caused erosion to the mound. However, by placing a stile on the western side, thus invisible from the road and gate into the field, visitors might not appreciate the available access to the monument. Hence, many tourists might visit Valle Crucis but not the Pillar. Partly to remedy this situation, Project Eliseg sought to incorporate public archaeological dimensions to the fieldwork.



Figure 4: View of the 2012 third season of excavations on the western side of the mound beneath the Pillar of Eliseg. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2012)

Project Eliseg's Public Archaeology

As the first modern investigation of this enigmatic monument, Project Eliseg aimed to both answer key research questions about its life-history and immediate context, notably the lack of evidence regarding the date and function of the mound beneath the Pillar.

Project Eliseg was inspired by the work of both Dai Morgan Evans on early medieval Powys (D.M. Evans 2005) and Nancy Edwards on early medieval inscribed and sculpted stones, the latter having contributed to the latest version of the Cadw guidebook for Valle Crucis (Edwards 2008: 52–56). It has sought to explore the complex biography and landscape context of the Pillar of Eliseg from prehistory to the present by investigating sections of the mound. The project also aimed to provide archaeological fieldwork training to university students. Integral to the aims were to inform Cadw's heritage management and conservation of the site, but also the Pillar's heritage interpretation by enhancing and extending public knowledge and engagement with a relatively neglected monument.

Between 2010 and 2012, three seasons of field investigation were carried out by Bangor and Chester universities in liaison with and support from Llangollen Museum and Cadw to find out more about the monument's life-history and immediate context (Figure 4). Drawing on university students and local volunteers, the project succeeded in investigating the mound structure, revealing a multi-phased kerbed cairn of Early Bronze Age date. It retrieved three stone cists, at least two associated with cremated human remains and artefacts, one of these completely undisturbed. Other phases of activity were revealed, including the reworking of the mound to re-establish the stone base and shaft-fragment in the late 18th century (Edwards *et al.* 2015; Edwards *et al.* forthcoming).

The project involved Llangollen Museum from its planning stage and thus incorporated local people from the project's instigation, operation and in voluntary capacities. As well as on-site engagement through an open-door policy and open days, including a first-year day-long event at Valle Crucis linked to the Festival for British Archaeology, the dig finds were rapidly put on display at Llangollen Museum. A new video and artist's reconstruction of the Pillar was commissioned. The directors delivered public talks in the region and beyond and there was significant media coverage of the project, including articles in archaeology magazines. Furthermore, we attempted various forms of social media engagement, including a website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and a vlog for Seasons 2 and 3 to particularly support engagement from those unable to physically access the dig and the monument (reviewed by Edwards *et al.* 2015; Tong *et al.* 2015).

In so doing, the project was fully aware that its archaeological interventions would become part of the Pillar's story. Furthermore, we were also cognisant of the multiple mortuary and memorial traces revealed by the dig, thus providing a distinctive tangle of ethical and social issues. We decided not to film the human remains being excavated or distribute photographs of these traces. At one level, this was a logical decision in alignment with the Ministry of Justice license. However, while ethically clear-cut and responsive to international trends against the display of human remains on social media, in the light of other recent uses of human remains in carefully staged public engagement strategies (e.g. Sayer and Sayer 2016; Shiner *et al.* 2019; Nowakowski and Gossip this volume) it might be argued that this decision hampered potential public interest, both locally, and via digital media. However, with the support of Suzanne Evans of Llangollen Museum, the cremated remains were put on display and integrated into a mock-up cist at the very base of the replica Pillar of Eliseg within the museum (S. Evans and Williams 2019). In this fashion, and perhaps exceptionally, the Early Bronze Age cremated dead have become a focal point, and the multiple phases of the excavation are directly evoked in a centrepiece museum display visited by thousands of visitors to Llangollen each year. Indeed, enhanced by Project Eliseg's finds, the museum has become, by happenstance as much as planning, a multitemporal cluster of memorial and mortuary traces encapsulating in a single open gallery the prehistory and history of the Vale of Llangollen from the Bronze Age to the present day (S. Evans and Williams 2019).

Mortuary and memorial fragments and absences

The nature of the human remains and mortuary contexts uncovered was a further consideration and challenge for public engagement. Fleshed cadavers (mummies and bog bodies, notably as well as articulated unburnt skeletons) and their intact, unrobbed contexts, dominate popular understandings and engagements with mortuary archaeology. They capture the public imagination for their individual and immediate connection to the past, offering a sense of stasis bringing the past directly to the modern viewer. Hence, such human remains have been frequently afforded new afterlives with names and detailed stories, even when they cannot be equated to historical personages (Giles and Williams 2016; Nordström 2016). Conversely, the more broken and partial, the less public engagement the mortuary and memorial remains might be seen to inspire. However, it is rarely that simple and distinctive dimensions of other forms of mortuary and memorial remains can evoke strong emotive and intellectual responses among visitors. These extend from intact and articulated human bodies, to disarticulated, shattered, partial and presented absences of the dead and a range of media of representation, from portraits and mythological scenes (see Giles and Williams 2016; Williams 2016; Williams *et al.* 2017). Fragmentary and absent traces of graves and tombs can thus acquire an enhanced fascination for the public, as with the Sutton Hoo sand bodies, cremations and robbed graves, but only if carefully narrated and contextualised (Giles and Williams 2016; Carver 2017; Walsh and Williams 2019). Moreover, the place of discovery can retain a powerful hold over even cremated human remains in the popular imagination, and they can retain significance for present-day people, as witnessed over the disputes regarding the excavation of late Neolithic cremation burials from Stonehenge (Willis *et al.* 2016). Yet the cremated remains from the Pillar, although now displayed in Llangollen Museum in relation to the replica of the Pillar (see below; S. Evans and Williams 2019), remain difficult to comprehend in terms of past mortuary practice without adequate interpretation and visualisation (Watson and Williams 2019).

Unlike projects focusing on investigations of inhumed skeletons or at least a single phase (or single-period) around which story can be spun (e.g. Sayer and Sayer 2016), Project Eliseg attempted to convey mortuary and memorial fragments relating to a multi-period story. Moreover, the partial and incomplete nature of the site held multiple mnemonic dimensions. These included the obviously partial investigation of the monument, given that Scheduled Monument Consent could only be obtained from Cadw for the investigation of disturbed sections on the eastern side of the cairn, due to the monument's scheduled status. Furthermore, there was a need not to undermine the Pillar on top, and so the centre of the monument remained unexamined.

At the Pillar of Eliseg, the cremated prehistoric remains uncovered within the cairn and displayed in Llangollen Museum comprise the shrunk, distorted, fragmented and partial remains of multiple individuals interred within one cist. The disturbed cremated remains from another cist were also retrieved. As with many prehistoric and early historic cremated remains, despite the effects of fire and centuries of burial, the bones retain recognizable elements of the human skeleton. Further still, their containment in stone boxes connects to a sense of formal ritual observance and the respectful treatment of the dead, and perhaps the creation in death of kinship and community rather than a celebration of individuality. While not preserving articulated skeletal likenesses of a person or persons, and thus denying visitors the uncanny and intimate experience of looking upon a long-dead human form, the cist context afforded a distinctively striking, compressed, contained and 'familiar' funerary space both during excavation and on display (cf. Williams 2016). As such, they retained an anonymity and distant presence, the details and character of the ceremonies they represent will be incomprehensible to the public without cohesive interpretation. Still, one might argue that they afford a prominent and powerful sense of mortality and acts of prehistoric remembrance.

The robbed and the disturbed cist possessed further mnemonic affordances by implying the former presence of something no longer extant. Furthermore, a 'stone box' was reportedly found in the 18th century containing a skeleton with a silver coin (Edwards 2009; 2013). This story of the antiquarian

discovery, no longer located, of a stone cist in the mound containing the skeleton in a stone cist, and with a skull claimed to have been gilded and reburied in the mound, provides a further literary presence without tangible trace (see Edwards 2009). The Latin inscription offers further sense of the absent dead, for while legendary figures are cited as ancestors for Cyngen and his dynasty, so are the ruler's immediate ancestors down to his great-great-grandfather Guoillauc (Edwards 2013: 326). Therefore, ancestors of Cyngen are named, but their bones and places of burial remain unlocated.

The fragmented integrity of the cross itself is also part of the picture. The Pillar is presumably cenotaphic, ruinous, and a multi-phased memorial commemorating the commissioner Cyngen and his great grandfather Eliseg, but through the inscription of the second Latin text on the eastern side, it has also come to commemorate (by his design) its 'restorer': Trevor Lloyd. Furthermore, the monument evokes other absences. It is missing its original cross-head and parts of the lower shaft, restricting appreciation of its original likely appearance and Christian significance. Moreover, the early medieval Latin text is partial, worn and difficult to discern: even if the 18th-century script is readily legible.

Putting these dimensions together, the monument was especially complex to engage the public on site, in the museum and via other media. Indeed, by revealing the multi-stages, multiple burials and multiple individuals, cremated, buried and some later disturbed and dislocated, Project Eliseg's excavations exacerbated and complicated, rather than cohered and explained, the sense of a fragmented, disconnected and complex history. Moreover, the lack of a tangible corporeal traces serves to afford an enigmatic character of the origins and life-history of both mound and cross.



Figure 5: Cadw's heritage interpretation boards: 'Bloodline of the Princes' at the entrance to the field containing the monument and augmenting the pre-existing Ministry of Works sign (left) and 'This is our Land' situated beside the entrance to Valle Crucis Abbey, facing inwards to encourage visitors who are exiting the ruins to next make the short walk to the Pillar of Eliseg (right).



Figure 6: The heritage poster within the community notice board beside the A542 at the foot of Velvet Mountain. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2016)

Distributed replications and representations

From our project's perspective, we were anxious to engage the public with the monument itself and its landscape setting, yet the monument was more than disjointed and partial, it was also its distributed and replicated nature that had to be contended with. The Pillar was both a strength and a major challenge for public engagement with the original monument and its environs.

On site, the new Cadw heritage board at the Pillar, and its counterpart at Valle Crucis (both installed in April 2017), afford striking but somewhat confusing information (Figure 5).¹⁰ The minimalist and opaque texts, although seemingly informed by the Project EliseG fieldwork, are more in keeping with

¹⁰ Preliminary critiques of this heritage boards can be found on Howard Williams's *Archaeodeath* blog: <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/08/this-is-our-land-the-new-sign-at-valle-crucis-about-the-pillar-of-eliseg/>; <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/08/bloodline-of-the-princes-the-new-sign-at-the-pillar-of-eliseg/>.



Figure 7: The Pillar of Eliseg is part of this striking heritage map (number 7) funded by Denbighshire County Council and on display in the Ponderosa Café. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2017)

the online Cadw ‘Lands of Legends’ project, which claims to showcase ‘the best of Welsh literature, culture, and myths right in the places which created and inspired them.’¹¹ Yet because the Pillar does not feature in any old Welsh stories, it does not itself form a part of the online tour, although Valle Crucis is included because of its association with Welsh poet Guto’r Glyn.¹² The hillfort and castle of Castell Dinas Brân is similarly steeped in legends and is far more visually striking in the landscape close by. By way of contrast, the Pillar could be said to fail to engage visitors because of its relative modesty, its lack of legends and later literary associations. A further limitation regarding the Pillar is that it is unique: it simply does not fit into a well-established heritage tourism visitor attractions in western Britain (i.e. dolmens and chambered tombs; hillforts; abbeys and priories, and castles).¹³

¹¹ <https://www.landoflegends.wales/about-land-of-legends>.

¹² <http://www.landoflegends.wales/location/valle-crucis-abbey>

¹³ <http://www.llangollenmuseum.org.uk/MythsAndLegendsIndex.html>



Figure 8: Llantysilio Green heritage board representing the Pillar of Eliseg (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2017)

Valle Crucis and its environs

The Pillar of Eliseg has a distinctive place in the visitor experience of the nearby Valle Crucis Abbey and environs and in this regards it has come to be represented on a series of heritage boards. As well as being widely visible from the vicinity, beside the A542 road and attendant footpath between Abbey Farm and the Abbey Grange Hotel there is a community notice board labelled 'Eliseg' including a centrally placed heritage information poster. It includes details of the Pillar, represented as a cross icon on the area map, and in its current form as a fragmented pillar (Figure 6).

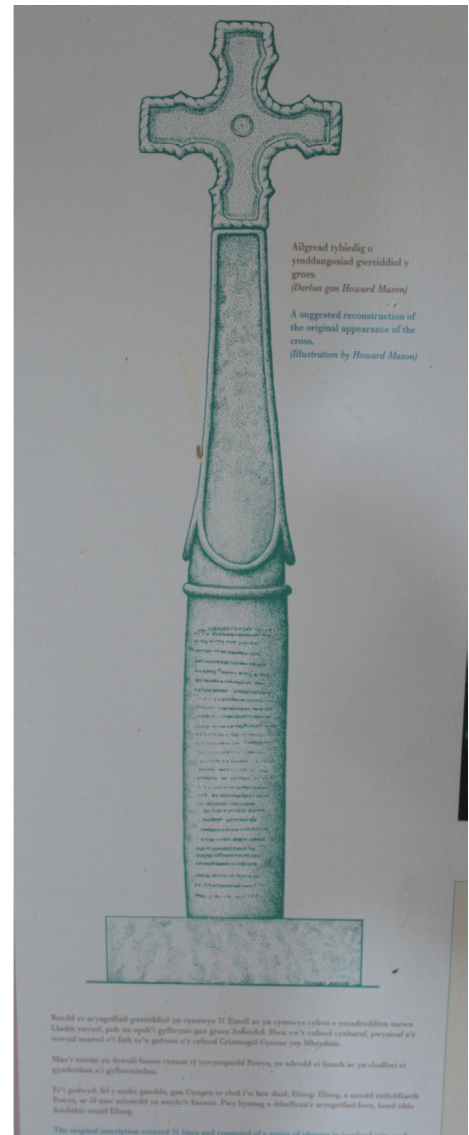


Figure 9: The Cadw heritage board in the abbot's house, Valle Crucis Abbey. (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2017)

Funded by the Heather and Hillforts landscape partnership scheme, there is a second further and recent representation of the Pillar on a large sign board within the popular Ponderosa Café, located just over 3km north of the monument on the A542 touring route over the Horseshoe Pass (Bwlch Oernant) (Figure 7).

Most recently, an additional heritage board has recently been placed, using archaeological illustrator Howard Mason's reconstruction of the Pillar (Edwards 2008, 55; see below). Located in the car park at Llantysilio Green, above the Chain Bridge Hotel off the B5103 and south-east of Llantysilio church, it marks out circular walks in the vicinity from the car park, including the location of the Pillar of Eliseg (Figure 8).

In addition to these signs, the Valle Crucis guidebook has long incorporated images and text about the Pillar (D.H. Evans 2008), and there is a sign board within the Abbot's House explaining the significance of the Pillar, together with the reconstruction by Howard Mason (Figure 9). Furthermore, as noted above, the Pillar was restored by Trevor Lloyd to be on the skyline from his summer house constructed in the grounds of the abbey, so the monument itself can be *seen* from the abbey. There is an additional



Figure 10: Still image from the VR tour of Valle Crucis Abbey showing the 'pillar' on its mound in the distance.
(Photograph: Howard Williams, 2017)



Figures 11: The Pillar of Eliseg replica and mock-up Early Bronze Age burial cist on display in the Llangollen Museum.
(Photographs: Howard Williams, 2016)

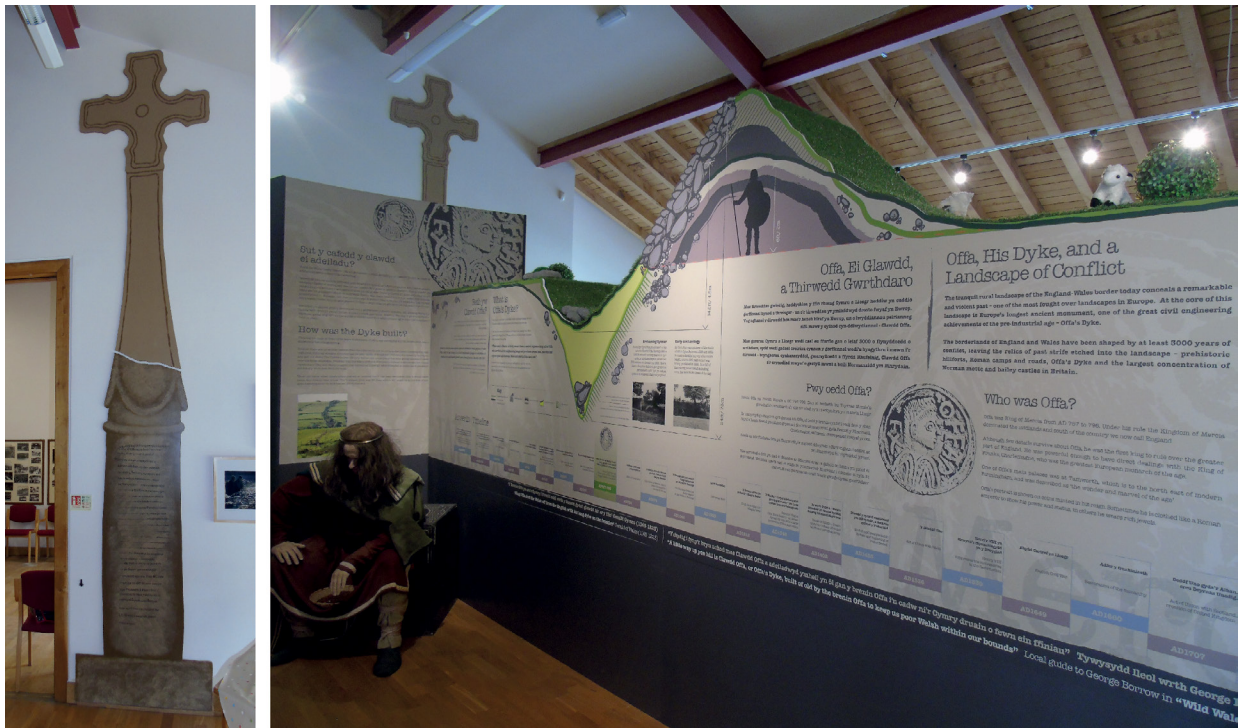


Figure 12: The Pillar's artistic reconstruction on display at the Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, Powys. (Photographs: Howard Williams, 2017)

presence of the Pillar of Eliseg at Valle Crucis: it appears and is mentioned in the background on the 3D virtual reality tour of the abbey in the Middle Ages, although interestingly it appears as a 'pillar' (i.e. in its restored late 18th-century form) rather than as a cross (Figure 10). Drawing these dimensions together, it is important to note that not only is the Pillar and mound visible from its environs and the abbey site, it is also represented in printed matter.

Llangollen Museum

In the heart of the town, situated at the centre of the small volunteer-run Llangollen Museum is the replica of the Pillar, composed in 1982 by Manchester University and kept in storage at the National Museum of Wales until 2007 when it came to the museum on a loan (S. Evans and Williams 2019) (Figure 11). Indeed, given erosion to the original monument in recent decades, the replica is more readily accessed, and its faint Latin text more easily discerned, than the original monument in the open air. As the original monument becomes further eroded and risks deliberate and accidental damage in an exposed location, so this cast grows in historical importance in its own right. In an urban setting at the heart of Llangollen, and at the very centre of the museum in a position where it cannot be missed, the replica is unquestionably far more accessible than the original, indeed many more local people have admitted to having seen the replica but not visited the actual monument a short distance away from the town of Llangollen.

The replica Pillar takes on a new significance by having a detailed text panel explaining its significance, informed by the latest academic research in a fashion that cannot be matched on the site itself. Its juxtaposition with the display of the finds from Project Eliseg and a mock-up cist grave, thus amplifies the contextual story of the monument in the museum. As well as this being a distinctive and prominent display of cremated human remains often side-lined in curatorial practice (see Williams 2016), the replica and its museum setting allude to the multi-temporality of the mound and cross (see also S.



Figure 13: Madoc's Column. (Photographs: Howard Williams, 2016)



Figure 14: Aaron Waton's reconstruction of the Pillar of Eliseg for Project Eliseg, reused in Cadw's 'Game of Thrones' display in the Eagle Tower, Caernarfon Castle. Photographs: Howard Williams, 2015 and 2017

Evans and Williams 2019). Moreover, those who have seen the replica in the museum might not visit the original. Hence, the Pillar's replica has a significant place in the museum, but also it serves to bind together the disparate elements of the museum space: operating as a multi-temporal *axis mundi* for the region's timeline. In short, one can apprehend and comprehend more about the Pillar of Eliseg in Llangollen Museum than at the real monument.

The Offa's Dyke Centre

Above, the close relationship of the Pillar of Eliseg to the interpretation of Offa's Dyke has been mentioned. There is a long tradition of exploring this relationship, with the estimation that Elise would have been a contemporary of King Offa (Hill and Worthington 2003: 108-110; Ray and Bapty 2016: 86, 89). The Offa's Dyke Centre, opened in Knighton, Powys, to promote the heritage and conservation of the monument and its landscape settings, contains a representation of the Pillar (as conceived by Howard Mason for Valle Crucis Abbey, see above) in a prominent fashion. Opened in 1999 and supported by (among others) the Offa's Dyke National Trail, it contains a café, a shop and there is a heritage display responding to the form of the dyke and also including a mannequin of Offa on his throne (Figure 12). Crudely mimicking the Vale of Llangollen's spatial relationship between linear earthwork and the Pillar, the image is situated against the west wall, thus facing the Dyke reconstruction in the centre of the exhibition. Standing as an icon to the largely invisible British (i.e. Welsh) enemies of Offa and his Mercian kingdom, and perhaps those that provided the motivation for Offa's Dyke's creation, we thus find Howard Mason's representation of the Pillar deployed on a grand scale, albeit indoors. The reconstruction clearly distinguishes between the surviving fragment and the lost section and envisages a wide broad cross-head, without figural art but with the panels denoted to suggest it might have once had some (Figure 12). In terms of the narrative, however, this is largely an Anglo-Saxon/English story, rather than one told from a Welsh perspective, and the Pillar is muted in the limited explanation it receives. Also, despite the opportunity here to direct visitors to the Pillar itself within its own context and surroundings, the Centre does not do so.

Madoc's Column

Installed and unveiled in 2001, Madoc's Column is situated by the junction between the village of Plas Madoc and the A539 from Ruabon to Llangollen. It was designed and carved by sculptor Ed Williams funded by an 'Arts for All' lottery grant from the Arts Council of Wales, plus funds from Wrexham County Borough Council to the Plas Madoc Community Association to improve the approach to the housing estate. Williams took ideas from the community of Plas Madoc and the Vale's historic landscape including the 'Dark Ages' to monumentalise the traffic island (Figure 11). The sculpture relates the passage of time and historical events. At the base, the influence of the pre-Christian era is revealed in imagery inspired by Welsh mythology but also in the medieval past, with helmeted figures evoking the time leading up to the time of the 12th-century prince of Powys – Madoc ap Gruffydd – and including medieval-type helmeted faces (Figures 11) and representations of Castell Dinas Brân and Valle Crucis Abbey. The panels further up the column depict the industrial revolution including the coal mine, the iron foundry and the Pontcysilte Aqueduct. The farm that Plas Madoc was built on is also represented. At the top of the column images from the present day are represented. So as one's eye ascends, so one gets closer to the present.

Whether by coincidence or design, Madoc's Column operates as a modern-day version of Eliseg's Pillar. While the stark traffic island contrasts with the Pillar of Eliseg's mound-top situation, both are beside principal routeways. Although it is unclear whether Madoc's Column has or ever will provide a focus for communal gatherings following its unveiling, Madoc's Column projects both imagined and valorised pasts of conflict and labour linked to a Welsh identity, read through images from bottom to top, it contrasts with the top to bottom textual narrative of the Pillar.

Caernarfon Castle

Subsequent to Project Eliseg's fieldwork, and directly inspired by it, in 2015, a new exhibition opened in the polygonal Eagle Tower at Caernarfon Castle: 'Game of Crowns'. The location of the exhibition is key: Caernarfon Castle was the stronghold built by Edward I adapting an earlier motte-and-bailey fortification and close to the ruins of the Roman fort of *Segontium* (Taylor 2001: 7, 38–39) to militarily and ideologically establish and consolidate political hegemony over Wales, and in particular his chief enemy in Gwynedd. Through its architecture, including that of the Eagle Tower, the castle imposed genealogical and royal claims over the past and the present (Taylor 2001: 30–32). Following the birth of his son at the castle in 1284, Edward I also projected domination over Wales's future via its architecture by making the infant 'Prince of Wales'.

Clearly intended to invoke the popular appeal of the television adaptation of George R. R. Martin's books – *Game of Thrones* – the display sets the later medieval history of Wales as a multi-generational game of chess between monochrome sculptural representations of male English monarchs (in white) and male Welsh princes (in red). The chessboard is both chronological and geographical – from the 11th to the early 14th centuries along its central divide, from Wales and England laterally. Stemming from the chessboard on one side is a much abbreviated genealogy charting the history of Welsh/English politics from Edward, The Black Prince, Henry and Owain Glyndŵr, Henry Tudor, Edward (future Edward VIII) and Prince Charles, who was invested as Prince of Wales at the Castle in 1969. This leads to a display case on one side of the room containing, not an 'iron throne', but the inauguration throne built for Prince Charles's investiture.

Complementing this royal timeline from the later Middle Ages to the present, charting back from the chessboard into the Early Middle Ages can be found on the opposite side of the chessboard. A similarly abbreviated bilingual timeline lists principal events and rulers: 1066 when the Normans invade England, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (King of Wales 1055–63), Hywel Dda (942–50) ruler of 'most of Wales' and before him Rhodri Mawr, king of both Powys and Gwynedd (844–78), inheriting the latter from his mother and thus ending an independent rulership of Powys following the death of Cyngen, the erector of the Pillar of Eliseg.

At the start of this timeline, and thus opposite the slate throne of Prince Charles's inauguration, is Aaron Watson's artistic reconstruction, produced for Project Eliseg in collaboration with Nancy Edwards with the subtitle 'Bloodline of the Princes'. It charts five names from the Pillar's text: 'Macsen Wledig' (which of course is *not* the name mentioned on the Pillar, this is a later derivation from the name mentioned: Magnus Maximus, the Western Roman Emperor known from the *Mabinogion*: stories compiled in the 12th and 13th centuries), 'Sevira', the daughter of Macsen, 'Vortigern', 'Elisedd ap Gwylog', and 'Cyngen ap Cadell'. In this fashion, the 'Game of Crowns' constitutes a spatio-temporal heritage display about royal conflict and descent charting a direct link between Elise and Cyngen and the modern Prince of Wales in an overtly nationalist narrative, simultaneously reifying the English crown's hegemony on Wales, and prior to this, Gwynedd's hegemony over Powys.

So whereas Llangollen Museum promotes and contextualises the Pillar's replica in relation to Project Eliseg's excavations, Offa's Dyke Centre visualised the Pillar in relation to the 8th-century Mercian frontier that preceded the Pillar, Madoc's Column creates a new genealogy for the Vale inspired by the Pillar, here we encounter something else again. The Eagle Tower installation offers a convoluted appropriation of a Powysian monument into a story of Gwynedd's rise to power and subsequent conflict between Welsh princes and the English crown, in the very heart of Edward I's colonial architecture. The fact that the Pillar's text conveys an origin myth that seems counter to that promulgated in Gwynedd (see Edwards 2009) is overlooked. Meanwhile, the installation projects back later legends to suggest that because Powys claimed descent from the Roman Western Emperor Magnus Maximus, they bought into a geographically located narrative only connecting Macsen Wledig to Caernarfon

centuries later. Cadw's display is, perhaps unwittingly, a new form of hegemonic myth-making in the heritage context, claiming the early medieval past for the present-day Prince of Wales. Yet, simultaneously it affords Powys's vision of the early medieval past with a new lease of life as the early history of all of Wales. Still, the adoption of Project Eliseg's reconstruction of the Pillar in itself shows the impact of the archaeological project, not at the site itself, but through its representation at a premier Welsh heritage destination. Indeed, far greater visitor numbers will view Aaron Watson's Pillar than will visit the ancient monument that inspired it. The Pillar of Eliseg's life-history certainly gets a new twist.

Conclusion

This article has refrained from reviewing the digital public dimensions of Project Eliseg and the Pillar of Eliseg more broadly (but see Tong *et al.* 2015 and also Williams and Atkin 2015), and will save its critique of the brand-new heritage boards erected by Cadw at the Pillar of Eliseg in April 2017 for another venue (Edwards *et al.* forthcoming). However, in this chapter, we have attempted to sketch and contextualise the challenges of Project Eliseg's public outreach activities to engage local people with the project. In many ways moderately successful, on-site activities were always going to be limited when the monument is not entirely physically or conceptually *in situ*, but instead it is fragmented in terms of the story of its mound, the stone sculpture itself, and its text. Furthermore, it is distributed elsewhere through a series of other pre-existing heritage sites and locales and those developed subsequent to Project Eliseg's fieldwork. One can engage with the Pillar of Eliseg on site, but also via heritage displays at Valle Crucis, Llangollen Museum, the Offa's Dyke Centre, encounter a modern-day artistic response to the Pillar at Plas Madoc, and finally in the Eagle Tower in Caernarfon, at the opposite end of North Wales. In this last instance, the Project Eliseg version of the Pillar, envisioned by Aaron Watson, has found a new home in the Eagle Tower mapping a pan-Welsh royal timeline. Therefore, in each of these settings, it is rehabilitated to speak to contrasting, and to some extra contradictory, stories of Mercian-Welsh conflict, Welsh nationhood, and regional and local identities.

The lesson to be learned is that public archaeology is about engaging the public with parts as well as wholes, which offer powerful possibilities and challenges for public engagement. This involves more careful consideration and new initiatives to tell the story of the Pillar of Eliseg on site, and in its landscape setting, both its early medieval phases, but also its longer biography from prehistory to the present. Moreover, the public archaeology of the Pillar is not simply about on-site heritage interpretation, but also about the connectivities with other physical and digital realms where the Pillar resides and is mobilised to tell different stories about people and place. Thus, when public archaeology concerns early medieval stone sculpture, we must accept that on-site public engagement is but one dimension of our activities. As a distributed monument, the Pillar of Eliseg can occupy different and contrasting historical and archaeological narratives about the monument, its landscape, and about Wales and Britain more broadly. Public engagement with the Pillar was already complex and multi-faceted prior to Project Eliseg, and Project Eliseg's discovery of fragmented human remains, and the pursuit of the Pillar's long-term biography, have augmented this complex story. The challenge for the future is to make this story one that can be developed further in dialogue with local and regional communities, as well as using digital media to engage global audiences. Thus, in engaging different publics with the Early Middle Ages and its monuments, we must operate on a range of scales and media. Furthermore, we must write multiple narratives involving different spaces, places and temporalities, rather than a simple nationalist story of early medieval kingdoms and their origins. Only in this way can we engage with rich, detailed and ethical early medieval public archaeologies of death and memory from seemingly ambiguous and inaccessible monumental fragments, traces and texts distributed across the contemporary landscape.

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Reading the Gosforth Cross: Enriching Learning through Film and Photogrammetry

Roger Lang and Dominic Powlesland

This chapter describes and reflects on a Royal Society for Arts Fellowship project that created lesson resources using early medieval stone sculpture, to enrich the view of the Viking Age found in the primary stage 2014 English National Curriculum. To this end, the project produced the first 3D scan of arguably the single most important free-standing stone cross of the Anglo-Scandinavian period from England: the Gosforth Cross. The model was made freely available online. Also, the model was deployed in films designed to present the way the original 10th-century viewers might have understood the markings on the cross, and to present the sophisticated multivalency of its iconography. The chapter considers the project's educational and interpretative achievements and the potential for future recording and resources resulting from digital scanning and dissemination of early medieval stone sculpture.

Introduction

The potential for the rich corpus of early medieval stone sculpture to inform digital education projects and wider digital engagement with the Early Middle Ages has only begun to be tapped. Aimed at illustrating its potential, the project described in this chapter was the result of a 43-year aspiration to investigate the famous Gosforth Cross. One of us (Lang) had first seen, and been fascinated by, the Gosforth Cross as an undergraduate in 1973, and had used it for over two decades as an element in his school teaching. Later, while working as a learning consultant, he was surprised to find a 19th-century plaster cast of the cross displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A further motivation came in 2014 when he was asked to make a learning resource about Daniel Maclisse's painting 'King Alfred in the Court of the Danes' (CultureStreet 2014). In consequence, he became aware of the striking similarity between Charles Dickens' view of the 'Danes' and the narrow impression of the Vikings found in the primary stage content suggestions of the 2014 English National Curriculum. In 2015, he first saw, on the Sketchfab website, Dominic Powlesland's scan of a prehistoric standing stone, even taller than the Gosforth Cross, in the churchyard of All Saints church, Rudston, East Riding of Yorkshire.

The coincidence of these various factors led to the idea for this Royal Society for Arts Fellowship project. The aim was to create free online learning resources aimed at using the Gosforth Cross as a uniquely powerful way of helping learners to understand the 10th-century Viking settlers in the North West as possessors of a vibrant Norse heritage that was actively and sophisticatedly merging with an already complex Insular Christian society. The project made use of the original monument in the churchyard of St Mary's, Gosforth, Cumbria, and the replica in the V&A.

Photogrammetry was to form a key part of the resource, both by making and publishing the first 3D image of the Gosforth Cross, and by employing the model as a fundamental ingredient of the short films that form a reinforcement element at the close of the lessons. Two schools from markedly contrasting environments, one opposite the original cross, one in London and thus close to the V&A, were involved in the project and trialled lesson plans, and they also provided peer-age presenters of the films (Lang 2016b and c).

Introducing the Gosforth Cross

In the churchyard of St Mary's, Gosforth stands the most impressive Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture in England (Bailey 1980: 127). The Gosforth Cross (Figures 1–2) is a 4.43m-high slender column of red



Figure 1: The Gosforth Cross, Gosforth, Cumbria (west side: A) (© R. Lang)

sandstone (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 104). Though it is patently a Christian high cross, and such objects are not found in Scandinavia, on closer inspection the four sides of the upper shaft can be seen to display the most detailed early medieval representation of the Norse apocalypse (*Ragnarök*) narrative to be found anywhere (Berg 1958: 42). The high level of agreement between its depictions of incidents and Norse literature composed hundreds of years later and a thousand miles away by Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson includes the slaying of Fenrir and the punishment of Loki (Faulkes 1995). This in itself would be sufficient to make it a highly important artefact, but the seemingly sophisticated ambiguity exhibited in the selection and presentation of the mythological elements gives the cross a unique significance.

The earliest known written description of the cross, together with a drawing of its east side, appeared in 1799 ('Carbo' 1799: 833), but the Norse subject matter of its iconography was not perceived in modern times until the 8 July 1881. This was when William Slater Calverley, vicar of Aspatria, identified on its west side the figure of Loki bound by the gods as a punishment for his part in the death of Baldr (Calverley 1883: 373). Loki proved the key to unlock the rest of the links with the *Ragnarök* narrative, and Calverley and others eagerly identified Christian parallels (Hodgetts 1882: 261).

Recognition of the importance of the Gosforth Cross quickly spread, and in the year following Calverley's discovery, the South Kensington Museum sent its 'Foreman Moulder', Sergeant Bullen of the Royal Engineers (Puisto 2018) to make the plaster cast which is still on show in what is now the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A 2018). The original cross having been subject to well over a century of further natural weathering and the attack of acid rain, has added to the importance of Sergeant Bullen's work and to that of the early drawings made by Calverley, Collingwood, Petersen and others (Calverley and Collingwood (ed.) 1899: 139–158; Parker and Collingwood 1917: 101). Today, both the original monument, and the replica, are significant artefacts in their own right, and in relation to each other (Foster and Curtis 2016).

Since the Victorian era, the Christian and mythological narratives on the Gosforth Cross have shed light on the Norse diaspora in relation to international, island-wide but also regional historical narratives.



Figure 2: The Gosforth Cross, Gosforth, Cumbria (west side: A) with Wasdale Screes in the distance (© R. Lang)

This has extended from historical and art-historical discussions to popular fiction (e.g. Collingwood 1895). Modern research into the early medieval North West of England has involved increasingly interdisciplinary approaches, ranging from deciphering the living archaeology of the Y chromosome (King 2015), to the use of environmental data to reconstruct land-use (MacKay and Tallis 1994). Yet in terms of Norse settlement in the region in particular, the Gosforth cross has held an enduring legacy as one of several pieces of sculpture showing ‘Scandinavian-derived traits’ which echo ‘pagan stories and motifs in art...’ (Griffiths and Harding 2015: 2), even if some researchers are emphasising the complicated interface of ‘citations’ between monuments in the 10th and 11th centuries around the Insular world (e.g. Williams 2016). Hence, just as for its Victorian rediscoverers, the Gosforth Cross has a vital place in the context of the current understanding of the complex and evolving society and religion of North West England in the Early Middle Ages. Indeed, it retains a role in narratives about ‘assimilation’ and persistence following Norse settlement, as well as the potentially active roles of these monuments in creating and recreating myths of origin among early medieval communities (see Kopár 2012; Williams *et al.* 2015). Hence, the Gosforth Cross is the ideal monument to explore new technologies for engaging communities with early medieval stone sculpture, and what it reveals about religion, society and the Viking ‘presence’ in the North West in particular.

The Vikings in the 2014 English National Curriculum

The first consideration in planning the project to create an educational resource for the Gosforth Cross and its V&A replica was to identify just what knowledge and understanding of the ‘Viking Age’ is required by the 2014 English National Curriculum – hereafter ‘ENC’ (ENC 2014) – and the age at which children are required to undertake its study. In the ENC, each subject area has its own section. These vary greatly in length with History being something of a slim volume, with the section for the whole of the first three Key Stages (KS) i.e. for ages 5–14, being less than 2,000 words in length. Subject content is composed of brief statutory requirements, for which there are usually around five non-statutory examples. The Early Middle Ages are required to be taught in KS2 (ages 7–11), though in practice the period is usually studied in Upper KS2 (ages 9–11) (Appendix A).

There seems to be a clear implied contrast between the two sets of ‘invaders’. Anglo-Saxons exhibit ‘art and culture’, have important kings, and a legal system worth studying, whereas the Vikings’ specialisms meriting investigation are limited to the allied violent activities of invading and raiding, with a sideline in protection racketeering. This view seems strikingly similar to the portrayal of the same period in Charles Dickens’ *Child’s History of England*, published in serial form from January 1851 to December 1852 (Dickens 1852: 25–31). Dickens’ ‘Danes’ are amongst the most-dastardly villains in the whole of the author’s work: ‘pestilential’, ‘false’, ‘cowardly’, ‘daring and cruel’ they ‘plundered and burned’ and decapitated King Edmund after tying him up and firing arrows at him. Only after being vanquished by the ‘best and wisest king that ever lived in England’, do they arrive at the point where: ‘They plundered and burned no more, but worked like honest men. They ploughed, and sowed, and reaped, and led good honest English lives.’ (Dickens 1852: 31).

Despite its quaint approach to early medieval history, the ENC does require teachers to include ‘depth studies’ that, ‘help pupils understand... the complexity of specific aspects of the content’. This gives the scope to investigate something of the wider view of Scandinavian cultural influence in England that can be gathered, alongside other sources, from the archaeological evidence of stone sculpture, and to present evidence to foster a more nuanced view of the Viking Age.

A thorough search for learning resources turned up nothing that could support teachers in meeting this aim by making use of the rich evidence from early medieval stone sculpture, let alone any reference to the Gosforth Cross. When making a more general search for free-to-use primary-age materials about Vikings, there was a dispiriting abundance of word-searches, lacklustre PowerPoints, colouring-in sheets and ‘puzzles’ like ‘Count the Vikings’ helmets’, but actual *learning* resources, let alone *higher-order* learning resources (ones fostering analysis, synthesis, or creative learning), proved few and far between.

The most impressive freely available materials come from the BBC, which through its Bitesize initiative has created a set of resources that can be used as lesson ingredients. They have 20 short videos on the Vikings, pitched at KS2, which include simple cartoons, short purpose-made films and more extended clips from Neil Oliver’s *In Search of Vikings* (BBC Bitesize Films). There are some sound ‘Classroom Ideas’ for teachers accompanying each clip, the best of which involve a significant degree of higher order learning. In addition, Bitesize offer six ‘Learners Guides’ (BBC Learners Guides) with some simple examples of interactivity. The Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) also offer useful directions for craft activities, such as ‘Viking Bread Making’, that could be integrated into a cross-curricula approach to the subject. However, given the absence of any materials making reference to the Gosforth Cross, we felt more than justified in embarking on the project.

Another factor in the project’s favour was the popularity of the Marvel/Disney *Thor* and *Avengers* film franchises (2011–present) which have at least served to make the names of the main characters of the Ragnarök story known to many of today’s children.

Creating the resources: the choice of schools

The presence of the Gosforth Cross’s Victorian virtual-reality clone in the Cast Courts of the V&A suggested the possibility of developing the learning resources with two schools in markedly contrasting areas; central London and rural Cumbria. The schools would also be involved in the production of two short films to be included in the resource, one featuring the actual cross, the other using the plaster-cast. Fortunately, the first two schools approached reacted enthusiastically to the idea.

With the Gosforth Cross directly over the road from its front gate, Gosforth Church of England Primary School was the obvious candidate for the Cumbrian phase of the project. The school has around one hundred pupils on its roll, and as with most primaries of that size, the pupils of years 5 and 6 are taught



Figure 3: The Sigurd Stone, Ramsundsberget, Södermanland, Sweden, drawing by Oscar Montelius (Archird 2012)

together in the same class. All the school's cohort have English as their home language. The school is rated 'good' by Ofsted.

Richard Cobden Primary in Camden was invited to be the London school to be involved in the work. They have 448 pupils on roll, around 95% of whom do not have English as their home language. At the time of the project, there were two year 5 classes. The school is rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

The lesson plans

Having established a curriculum need for the materials, lesson plans were developed with the active involvement of James Partington, one of the year 5 teachers in Richard Cobden School, at whose suggestion an element of exploratory talk (Littleton and Mercer 2013: 16) was introduced. The lesson plans have since been published on the web, both in a blog (Lang 2016a), and on the Culture Street website (CultureStreet.org.uk. 2016). They consist of two 70-minute lessons with the option of some extension work.

The core learning objectives are:

- Pupils will gain an insight into Viking culture through studying one of the most important Norse myths and one of the saga episodes most commonly represented on early medieval stone sculpture;
- They will learn to 'read' non-written primary sources and relate them to simplified translations of the Norse narratives;
- Pupils will learn that the peoples we call 'Vikings' did not all conform to a single cultural stereotype and that the 10th-century settlers in the North West are likely to have arrived already having had contact with Christianity;
- Pupils will gain an insight into the way religions can assimilate existing beliefs as they spread new areas.

In the first lesson, the learners are given a line drawing of the early eleventh-century Sigurd carving at Ramsund, Sweden (Archird 2012; Montellius 1877: 349) (Figure 3). The carving is incised into a large rock outcrop. The design has no evidence of a parallel Christian reading, though the inscription refers



Figure 4: The 'crucifixion scene', Gosforth Cross, east side (C) Scan by D. Powlesland with overlay by R.Lang from Parker and Collingwood 1917: 101

to a link with what is thought to have been an indulgence-seeking donation made by a widow for her husband (Gräslund 2003: 491).

The children are asked to work in pairs, and through exploratory talk, to devise and storyboard a narrative that could be illustrated by the carving. They are given no background information as to any of the characters involved and are only told that the runic writing within the picture provides no direct clue to the meaning of the design. The learners have around forty minutes to work on the storyboard, after which time each pair reports back to the group with the outline of their story. They discuss what they think to be the most important similarities and differences between their versions.

The children are then provided with a shortened version of the Sigurd and Fafnir episode from the *Völsunga Saga* and asked to look silently at the drawing and identify as many elements of the saga narrative that they can find depicted on it. They report back their findings.

An extension offered in the lesson plan is for the learners to study downloadable images of the east and north sides of the Halton Cross (Bailey 2010: 182) and identify the episodes of the Sigurd story they portray.

The method of the second lesson is essentially that of the first, but with drawings of the more complex Gosforth Cross taking the place of the Sigurd illustrations, and a short version of the Ragnarök elements from the death of Baldr to Fenrir's dispatch at the hands (and foot) of Víðarr forming the textual element. The pupils can be told in advance that one of the characters involved in the story, as with the start of the Sigurd episode, is Loki. We found that amongst the many children who were aware of the Viking gods' modern media incarnations, Loki was by far the most popular.

The lesson continues with a second set of information describing episodes from the crucifixion account in the Gospel of John and eschatological events in the Book of Revelation. The pupils again look at the Gosforth Cross drawings and see which elements might be read as illustration of these narrative events (Figure 4) and discussing their findings.

At the end of the lesson, both of the films are viewed, starting with the London version, and the learners are asked to identify information that was added to the Cumbrian film shot in and around Gosforth. Additional work can involve pupils thinking of common storylines between either of the Norse narratives they have studied and other stories or films.

Staff in both schools found the project very worthwhile in deepening their pupils' understanding of Viking culture and reported that the pupils found the tasks to be challenging and enjoyable.

The theme of the film script

The object in making the films was to produce resources that could be shown at the end of the second lesson, or used in lesson plans of a teacher's own devising, or indeed be available for anyone using a search engine to find information about the subject. The act of providing the voice-overs for the films had no planned learning outcomes for the children involved, and they had no input to the writing of the scripts, though the Camden pupils were given the opportunity to make their own short script for a re-edited version of the film that was shown to a whole school assembly.

The intention was for the films to present parallel readings of the cross from Norse mythological and early medieval Christian perspectives; particularly with regards to soteriology and eschatology, but to do so in a way that would be accessible to the intended audience of years 5 and 6.

A keen interest in eschatology was more widely spread amongst Christians a thousand years ago than it is today, where it is primarily, though not exclusively, a concern within elements of the more scripturally conservative wing of Protestantism. Throughout medieval Christianity, as with the theologians of the early church, the Apocalypse was seen as a continuation of the Easter narrative, thus closely fusing soteriological and eschatological concerns. As Bynum and Freedman argue, it is important to attempt to understand the believer's actual beliefs, rather than apply a modern taxonomy originating in more recent religious thought:

Recent scholarship has tended to treat separately concerns that both medieval intellectuals and ordinary people would have seen as closely linked: death, the afterlife,

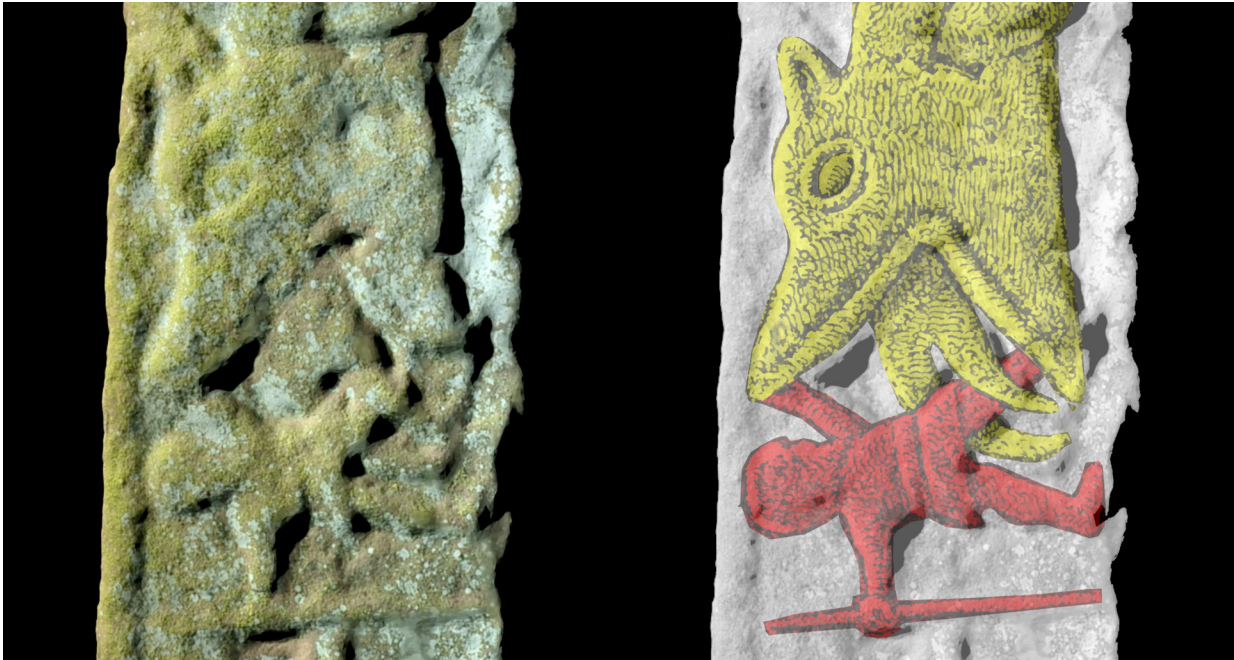


Figure 5: Viðarr and Fenrir scan from the Gosforth Cross, east side (C) (Scan by D. Powlesland with overlay by R.Lang from Parker and Collingwood 1917: 101)

the end of time (whether terrestrial or beyond earth), and theological anthropology or the theory of the person.(Bynum and Freedman 2013: 1)

Perhaps the most impressive evidence for the crucifixion–Apocalypse link in the early medieval mind-set is to be found in the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, where in the space between lines 100 and 105, Christ goes from death on the cross to involvement in Doomsday (Hostetter 2018). Bailey argues that the Halton Cross referred to above, is also concerned with ideas of salvation (Bailey 2010: 182).

As mentioned above, the subject matter of these narratives; their heroes, monsters, tricksters and comedy moments, are also popular with school students. In order for the films to utilize this interest in order to retain children’s attention, it was important for the details on the cross to be related in the context of narratives as much as possible. Apart from using a fade-in of a Scandinavian valkyrie pendent during the second minute of the films, there is no reference to evidence of skeuomorphic influence.

Far from being a constriction or a ‘dumbing down’, it can be argued that the resulting phenomenological understanding offered by focussing on the storyline does have some benefits. As the cross’s target audience and its likely commissioners would have been Christian Hiberno-Norse settlers, their readings of the cross would probably have centred on the illustrations of Norse myths and their similarity with existential Christian themes, rather than art-historical matters such as comparisons with volutes in carvings on the other side of the Pennines. Therefore, by concentrating on the narrative and ‘bracketing out’ from the films, concerns about Carolingian precedents and modern art-historical terms like ‘Borre’ and ‘Jellinge’, we may be getting closer to an awareness of how the carvings were perceived in the 10th century, and perhaps even some insight to the eidetic response they elicited.

The film is essentially sanguine about the chances of understanding the meanings of most of the carvings. Bailey (1980: 103) points to the length of time between the making of the Gosforth Cross and the first surviving prose iteration of the saga that describes *Ragnarök* and advises caution against an over-reliance on using Snorri’s thirteenth-century writings as a guidebook to the carvings. However,

there are sufficient similarities between details on the Gosforth Cross and Snorri's account to show that the basic narrative line remained preserved over the centuries and in the most detailed episodes of the carving the correspondence between sculpture and text is strikingly obvious. Compare, for example, the Gosforth graphic portrayal of Víðarr killing the giant wolf Fenrir by placing one foot on the beast's lower jaw and thrusting with his right hand at the inside of the top jaw, with Snorri's Víðarr, who... 'set one foot upon the lower jaw of the Wolf:... with one hand he shall seize the Wolf's upper jaw and tear his gullet asunder' (Faulkes 1995: 54) (Figure 5). The punishment of Loki can also serve as a brilliantly effective and economic depiction of the later written source, hence Calverley's original 'lightbulb moment' in the summer of 1881.

In comparison, the written transmission of narratives is well known to undergo numerous changes, whether by accident or deliberate redaction. For example, Peter J. Gurry estimates the number of variants, excluding alternative spellings, among New Testament manuscripts to be around 500,000, though he ascribes the great majority to accidental errors (Gurry 2015: 97). Therefore, we should not feel overly inhibited when viewing the cross to recall the chain of events in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* (Faulkes 1995), from the Death of Baldr through to the scenes from *Ragnarök*, particularly when they seem to offer such an impressive match. The result is a view of the cross as an illustration of a coherent narrative albeit not set out in chronological order; in this respect, it is much like the Ramsund version of the Sigurd and Fafnir episode, though critically different in respect of the parallel narrative it can be seen to convey.

The idea that earlier peoples possessed the ability to be able to understand a story in more than one way is not that radical. Parables, even allegorical ones, are found in most religious traditions and their existence clearly points to the assumption that an understanding of such ambivalence is not beyond the intended audience. Neither is graphic ambiguity entirely unknown. One of the masterpieces of Indian religious art, the 7th-century AD rock carving 'Descent of the Ganges' or 'Arjuna's Penance' at Mamallapuram, has been compellingly argued by Padma Kaimal to have been deliberately organised to be viewed as illustrating two distinct narratives (Kaimal 1994: 1–27).

The only aspect of the cross where the film's argument for a deliberate Christian–Norse myth parallel may be contentious is in the Crucifixion scene on the east side, though again this is not a new idea. Calverley described this section of the cross as 'a churchyard picture-Bible at once to the Pagan and to the Christian' (Calverley and Collingwood 1899:153) and as Kopár (2012: 98) points out, A. B. Cook (1925: 305) suggested the parallel interpretation of the scene as Christ/Baldr, Longinus/Hod and Mary Magdalene/Nanna. Kopár (2012: 100) makes a strong case for Hel as the more likely pagan candidate for the female figure than Baldr's wife.

Given that the carver would have been aware of the death narratives of Baldr and Christ, had he not wanted the scene to be ambiguous, he needed only to put the central figure on a cross if the Crucifixion was intended to be the exclusive subject. Alternatively, had the aim been solely to portray the Norse episode, the weapon could have left Hoder's grasp. Either would have been well within the ability of the cross's creator and would have required few, if any, additional chips from the chisel. The similarities and differences between the scene and the stone plaque referred to as Penrith 11 in the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 140–142) suggest that both have taken a piece of metalwork very similar to the Clonmacnoise Plaque as their model. Both retain the frame originally needed to facilitate the hollow casting and give stability to the finished piece, but whereas Penrith 11 follows the design of the bronze quite closely, the Gosforth sculptor positions the figures that are below Christ outside the frame, substitutes a female figure holding a container for Stepharton, and omits the diminutive angels perched on Christ's outstretched arms. The inclusion of any of these features would have precluded a Death of Baldr reading of the image. Equally importantly, in the context of the storyline, the death of Baldr is the reason for Loki's punishment, his escape from which is the catalyst for Ragnarök. It would be odd not to miss the chance for it to be represented (see also Figure 6 as a further example of this strategy).



Figure 6: The 'Loki Stone', Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria. (© R. Lang)

Filming and photogrammetry

At the outset, the hope was to make films that blended 'real' footage of the pupils, and the cross or its plaster cast with a navigable 3D image. As there was no existing 3D image of the cross, Powlesland was contacted to see if he would be interested in producing one. Powlesland in turn contacted Professor Joanna Story of the University of Leicester, who arranged funding for the photogrammetry from the Leverhulme Trust, as it came within the remit of their sponsorship of 'The Impact of Diasporas on the



Figure 7: The Rothley Cross, Leicestershire. (© D. Powlesland)

Making of Britain' project, for which Powlesland has also produced the photogrammetric model for the Rothley Cross (Figure 7). Story also suggested the lines at the start of the Cumbrian film in which reference is made to Viking-origin settlers having experience of farming marginal land (Figures 9–11) (A technical account of the photogrammetry process is to be found in Appendix B.)

With the photogrammetry being successful, despite less than ideal weather conditions, the production of the films could go ahead. Children from Richard Cobden School were filmed outside the Victoria and Albert Museum, and in the Cast Courts next to Sergeant Bullen's 1882 copy. Pupils from Gosforth Church of England School had only a 25m walk from the school gate for their scenes. The children read the voiceovers from the supplied script. The sound quality of the Gosforth film is markedly clearer as it was recorded separately in the quiet of the church, whereas for the London film, there was (unsurprisingly in what is one of the world's busiest museums) a significant amount of extraneous noise that had to be filtered out. (A technical account of the filming and compositing is to be found in Appendix C.)

Reflections on 3D objects and public engagement

It is often claimed that 3D scanning, in combination with 3D printing, now makes it possible to preserve or restore historic artefacts that no longer exist (Black 2016). As Powlesland argues, the statement that photogrammetry can preserve heritage is 'an absurd assertion', but what it can do, is accurately map a 3D surface and drape high-resolution photographic textures on that surface in such a way as to facilitate interaction and close examination that may not even be possible in the field (Powlesland 2017: 95). There are five key areas in which it can help public engagement.

Overcoming geographical isolation

Gosforth is about as impressive an example of geographical isolation as anywhere in England. Situated on the far west coast, it is hard enough to reach for many Cumbrians. Though on a map it seems a half hour drive to the hub of the Lake District, the shortest route to Ambleside traverses two challenging mountain passes. In 2016, Cumbria and the Lake District attracted 45 million visitors (Cumbria Tourism 2017), but during the entire time the project was filming and photographing – a total of more than twelve hours during the Spring and early Summer of 2016 – only one small group entered the churchyard to have a quick look at the cross (cf. Tong *et al.* 2015).

The project has resulted in Powlesland's 3D images being freely available to anyone with access to the internet and a computer or hand-held device. Since the autumn of 2017, it has been possible with some mobile phones and tablets to view the scans of the Gosforth Cross on the Sketchfab website as VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (augmented reality) objects that, on the screen, appear in the same space as the viewer and can be walked around. One consequence of this is that an AR representation of a distant early medieval stone sculpture can be placed next to a different piece the viewer is seeing in the real world, thus enabling a dimension of comparison previously unattainable.

Optimum lighting

The Gosforth Cross is a telling example of the effects of acid rain in the years that have followed the first detailed drawings. Some details of the cross that were clearly visible to late Victorian antiquarians can just be glimpsed, if at all, in the light of a low sun striking the side of the cross at a raking angle. Such lighting can only apply to one side at a time, even when the weather conditions are favourable, whereas a 3D image can be artificially lit to provide optimum conditions, casting shadows that bring all of the design into sharper relief.

Choice of viewpoint

A navigable 3D image presents the opportunity to study the cross from viewpoints not normally available. Most academic photographs tend to be taken face-on to the object's sides, but it can be argued that viewing from the corner of adjacent sides can provide insights into similarities of meaning that



Figure 8: The Little Clifton stone cross-shaft, Cumbria (© R. Lang)

would otherwise be less likely to occur, such as the west and south sides of the Halton Cross that may share the same soteriological concerns (Lang 2017a). Another advantage is that tall objects, such as the Gosforth Cross, can be better examined without vertical distortion via this method.

Access

Some of the most interesting pieces of early medieval stone sculpture are in churches. Security concerns require many of these to be locked and it is not always easy to get access, or even identify key holders.

Colour

Among the opportunities for developing photogrammetry-based resources to increase public understanding, one of the most important is the issue of colour applied to stone carving. In the Halton film cited above, it is used just to clarify designs by fading early modern drawings of the cross in-and-out as coloured layers above the view of the imported 3D object. However, there is a more important potential use for it which seems under-exploited to date.

The steady accumulation of archaeological evidence had, even by 1980, made it possible for Bailey (1980: 26) to assert that, in terms of early medieval stone sculpture, ‘There are...sufficient survivals to assure us that colouring was the normal treatment’.

The most extensive Cumbrian example of this is Penrith 11: the crucifixion plaque in Kendal Museum referred to above. The colouring described by Bailey and Cramp (1988: 110–111) can be seen in a recent 3D scan (Lang 2018). There is also strong indirect evidence in the existence of sculptures such as Great Clifton 1 (Figure 8) at St Luke’s, Little Clifton, Cumbria (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 110–111; Lang 2017b) where the original block was quarried across differently coloured layers of stone and yet carved in a manner that neither attempts to use, nor to disguise this flaw. This suggests that the colour difference would have been subsequently obscured with paint (Figure 8). Writing of slightly later medieval sculpture, Perez cites a number of illustrated manuscripts elsewhere in Europe in which stone sculptures are shown richly coloured (Perez 2013).

In the similar awakening to the idea that classical Greek and Roman sculpture was painted, there was a gap of half a century between Quatremère de Quincy initiating antiquarian awareness (Sabatini 2006: 393), and the wider UK public knowledge resulting from the work of John Gibson RA appearing in the International Exhibition of 1862 (Liverpool Museums 2018). That awareness was rather short-lived, but the more recent work of Vinzenz Brinkmann has rekindled a degree of wider recognition (Brinkmann *et al.* 2017).

With early medieval stone sculptures, not only is there still an absence of information about colouring on such pieces in many of the museums or churches where they are to be found, even in most academic work on the subject, colouring usually merits little more than a passing comment. And yet, as Bailey cautioned:

we must be very careful when we judge the competence and effect of a carving. We must remember that we are looking at a sculpture which was probably not designed to be seen in this state. We are seeing it at a stage before completion. Any use of gesso would change the contours of a carving; miscuttings would not be visible; changes in geological carving would be masked. ... and it would be possible to add details of facial features, clothing foliage and beasts to the basic carved forms. (Bailey 1980: 26)

Unfortunately, it therefore follows that we cannot have certainty about what such added details would have looked like, though contemporary metalwork designs can offer useful insights and fragments of colour and gesso have been found on a few of the stone sculptures. 3D digital media in conjunction with film gives the opportunity to present best guesses at ways in which artefacts may have been coloured by fading from the present-day appearance of the object to a coloured representation. It would also be possible to create an AR app that would appear to colour a real object when viewed through a mobile phone’s or tablet’s camera.

Current and Future Work

One of us (Powlesland) has continued his involvement with early medieval stone sculpture with the support of the British Academy’s ongoing project to catalogue and record all English pieces from the period. The speed with which the application of Structure from Motion (SfM) modelling has been adopted by archaeologists and those studying structures sculptures and even small objects reflects the rapid rate of change in all forms of digital technology. The acceptance and realisation that this is a technology that empowers us, whether fieldworkers and the academic community, is reflected through a new program of SfM recording designed to enhance the conventional drawn, photographed and documented record assembled within the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. This multi-volume publication initiated by Professor Rosemary Cramp with the first volume published in 1977,

forms the ultimate reference point for this material. Although conceived as printed volumes they are all to be freely available online. The addition of a Sketchfab catalogue of 3D models of selected key sculptures combined with an archive strategy which secures the long-term storage of the primary digital photographs, 3D files and models in portable data formats adds a new dimension to this magnificent resource. The use of standard file formats means that as time progresses and the software develops we will be able to do offer different perspectives on the sculpture. For instance, in the example of the Rothely Cross recorded for the Corpus, all four faces can be viewed simultaneously whilst the virtual lighting can be changed with the press of a key and movement of the mouse to enhance aspects of the sculptures (Powlesland 2018a) (Figure 11).

As part of his current MRes course, one of us (Lang) will be making the first critique of the deployment in educational resources of the wide range of methods and projects available to digitally record early medieval stone sculpture. He will be testing and refining the Gosforth lesson plans with a new group of schools not previously involved with the project and developing different pedagogical approaches using models of other pieces from the period.

Furthermore, Lang has identified new avenues for public engagement with the Gosforth monuments. Notably, since completing the research for this chapter, Lang has become aware of academic research that offers a credible explanation for why the abnormally slender early medieval high cross at Gosforth has survived almost entirely intact when so few of the others in the assemblage have avoided significant damage. Amy Miller (2012: 87–104) identifies clear evidence that the angle of the sandstone deposit layers with the Gosforth cross do not run vertically, as is the normative practice in monolithic upright early medieval structures such as high crosses. Instead, on three of the sides, there are visible signs that reveal the layers to be at an angle; Miller estimates this angle to be at approximately 15 degrees to the vertical from the foot of the east to the north of the west sides. Miller gives two suggested reasons for this practice; avoidance of shedding unintended stone when chiselling combinations of vertical and horizontal lines, and diminishing the risk of later deterioration of the carving by water ingress down the vulnerable vertical bonds between layers. The latter of these two problems would be unlikely to manifest itself during the lifetime of the sculptor whereas the former could have an immediate reputational and/or financial impact on the carver. Therefore the risk of accidents during production would seem much the most likely motivation, but the secondary benefit has lasted for over a millennium. These insights into the geology, carving and installation of the Gosforth cross constitute a further fascinating story meriting integration into future public engagements strategies deploying digital photogrammetry and educational videos.

Conclusions

Although the one near certainty about the future is its unpredictability, particularly so with technology, the level of detail that can now be reached with the photogrammetry of early medieval stone sculptures is already more than is needed for use in public engagement. Already, zooming-in to highest resolution on a 3D image made with photographs taken on a full-frame DSLR camera can be rather like holding a magnifying glass to a pointillist painting: the closer you look, the less you see of the subject matter.

At present, photogrammetry offers a low-cost yet highly valuable way for the heritage sector to engage a schools audience and the wider public and its use when blended with film is a surprisingly easy and effective technique to deliver. It also can create something that, because it records the object as it is now, might be of even greater use in the future. In a way this brings us close to Sergeant Bullen, standing in a Cumberland churchyard, a day's journey from home, waiting for the plaster to dry, checking his pocket watch and trusty copy of 'Bradshaw's'.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: References to Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in the English National Curriculum

Statutory

Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots. Examples (non-statutory) include:

- Anglo-Saxon invasions, settlements and kingdoms;
- place names and village life;
- Anglo-Saxon art and culture;
- Christian conversion – Canterbury, Iona and Lindisfarne.

Statutory

The Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor. Examples (non-statutory) include:

- Viking raids and invasion;
- resistance by Alfred the Great and Athelstan, first king of England;
- further Viking invasions and Danegeld;
- Anglo-Saxon laws and justice;
- Edward the Confessor and his death in 1066.

Appendix B: Technical notes on the photogrammetry

The photogrammetric scan of the cross was made by taking over 200 photographs using an Olympus E5 II camera on an extendable pole with additional images taken from a drone (Lang 2016d) (Figures 9–10). The large number of high-resolution photographs, taken in such a way that all photographs overlap multiple other frames, ideally by c. 75% or more, are required so that the digital photogrammetric 3D model can be accurately constructed. The images were processed using Agisoft Photoscan Pro software, which uses well-established software algorithms concerned with creating Structure from Motion, to precisely locate the camera positions in 3D space and from this, compute a 3D cloud of millions of individual points precisely replicating the shape of the sculpture. The process required a high-powered desktop computer and took several days of processing, but this was more than justified by the result. Agisoft Photoscan Pro offers a range of options, which are necessary for precise archaeological recording, and are not available in the very affordable Standard version that still produces the same quality of 3D models.

This point-cloud forms the basis for calculating a 3D mesh of triangles onto which fragments of the photographs are projected to create a lifelike three-dimensional digital photograph (Lang 2016e; Powlesland 2016) (Figure 11). This 3D image can be viewed, measured and examined at scale and from any position within an internet browser on a personal computer or even a mobile phone or published as a 3D object in a Portable Digital Format (.pdf) file. The digital 3D model could also be used for printing precisely scaled 3D models. The same set of photographs can be used to create models at very high resolutions to satisfy the most demanding scientific examination or low resolution, but visually stunning, models for public engagement purposes. By uploading the 3D model to the Sketchfab 3D, VR and AR publishing platform, the results of the Gosforth Cross survey can now be witnessed in an exceptional interactive environment from anywhere with an internet connection. In 2018 a reprocessed model of the cross was generated using the 2016 pictures, but with the latest version of Agisoft Photoscan Pro (Powlesland 2018b).

The footage was recorded in 4k format (4,096 by 2,160 pixels) at 25 frames per second, using a Panasonic GH4 Micro Four Thirds camera, and exported in the smaller resolution full HD 1920 x 1080 format. This enabled flexibility in framing the film to fit with the imported clips of the 3D model.

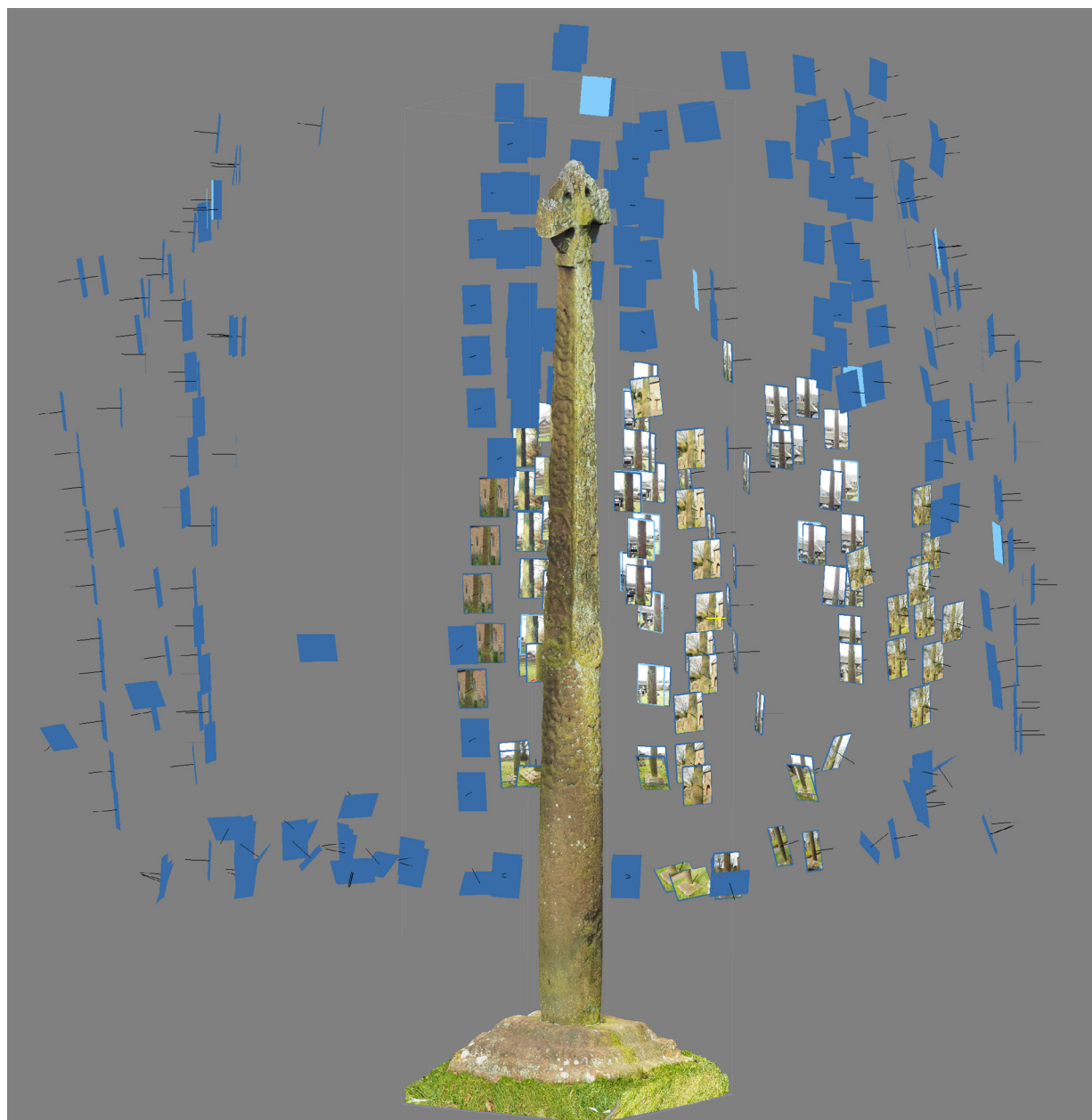


Figure 9: Camera positions, side view. (© D. Powlesland)

The 3D model, supplied by Powlesland in .obj format, and its associated texture in a .jpg file, were imported into the open-source ‘Blender’ software. Frames captured from footage were also used as background layers so the object could be positioned in an appropriate place to merge seamlessly with the footage of the actual cross or the V&A cast.

The animation within Blender was produced by rotating the object and moving the virtual camera in and out to set key-frames. The animation was rendered as a sequence of .png images with a transparent background, at a rate of 25 frames per second. The final video editing and compositing was performed in the free version of DaVinci Resolve 12.

For the London film, since there was no available digital model of the plaster cast, Powlesland’s Gosforth scan was imported into the footage without its .jpg texture file, but with the colour of its surface altered to match that in the Cast Court footage.

The identification of the various elements on the cross, which can be difficult to read even on the digitally lit modern model, was reinforced with overlaid images taken from early drawings by Parker made in 1917. The images were cropped and tinted in the open-source Gimp software. As far as possible only open-source or free-to-use proprietary software was used in the project. Subtitles were created in WebVTT format from the script and are available on the Vimeo versions (Lang 2016b) and (Lang 2016c).

Appendix C: Technical notes on the film production

The footage was recorded in 4k format (4,096 by 2,160 pixels) at 25 frames per second, using a Panasonic GH4 Micro Four Thirds camera, and exported in the smaller resolution full HD 1920 x 1080 format. This enabled flexibility in framing the film to fit with the imported clips of the 3D model.

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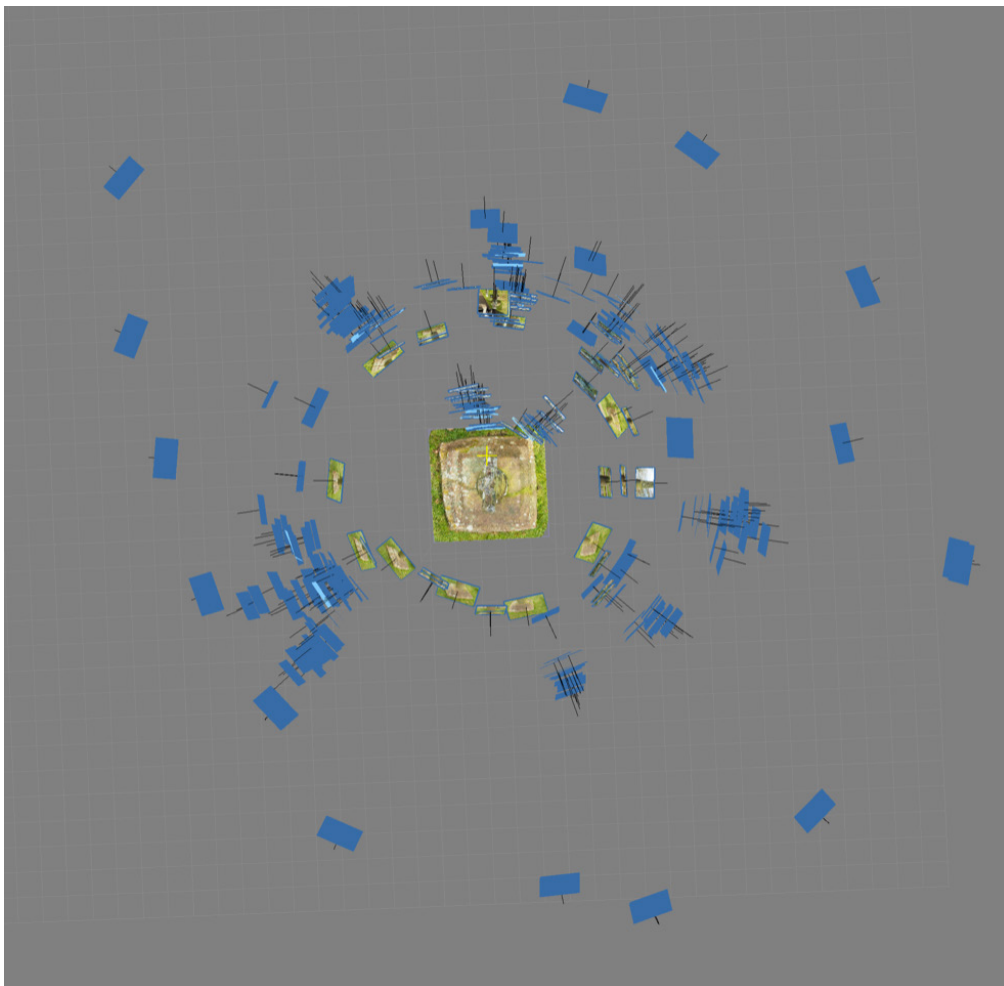


Figure 10: Camera positions, from above. (© D. Powlesland)



Figure 11: Point cloud data from the scan. (© D. Powlesland)

background, at a rate of 25 frames per second. The final video editing and compositing was performed in the free version of DaVinci Resolve 12.

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Crafting the Early Middle Ages: Creating Synergies between Re-enactors and Archaeologists

An interview with Adam Parsons and Stuart Strong

What the current and potential synergies between living history and archaeology for public-facing research in, and public engagement with, the Early Middle Ages? This topic has received limited sustained attention to date, and the interview format provides a medium for an in-depth exploration of the topic. This chapter presents the results of an interview conducted by Howard Williams (HW) with Adam Parsons (AP) and Stuart Strong (SS) at the Heysham Viking Festival on Saturday 20 July 2019, exploring re-enactment as public archaeology. The recorded interview was then edited by AP and SS and an introduction composed and further editing completed by HW. The interview focuses on the benefits and challenges of forging closer and sustained collaborations between archaeologists and re-enactors.

Introduction (HW)

Early medieval archaeology has a long-lasting relationship with re-enactors, witnessed with the successful annual Jorvik Viking Festival, and innumerable events at heritage sites up and down the country as, for example at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk). Societies possess their own sites for re-enactment, but heritage sites involving experimental dimensions are popular tourist and educational destinations where re-enactors are featured, including Jarrow Hall (formerly Bede's World) (Tyne and Wear), Butser Ancient Farm (Hampshire) and West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village (Suffolk). There are regular re-enactment events to celebrate the anniversaries of key early medieval events, including the Battle of Hastings. Similarly, there have been distinctive one-off events at key historical anniversaries including the re-enacted funeral of Lady Aethelflaed of Mercia in Gloucester to mark the 1100th anniversary celebrations of her death.¹

I have been increasingly struck by the many existing synergies between re-enactment and archaeological research, and specifically the long-standing involvement of professional archaeologists in a host of re-enactment activities and groups, including individuals who are both archaeologists *and* re-enactors. Recently, I've spoken at annual conferences of national re-enactment groups and at public conferences coinciding with re-enactment festivals.² Most recently, I have witnessed the Living History Festival at the Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton (13th–14th July 2019)³ and Heysham Viking Festival (20th–21st July 2019).⁴ Hence, the important role of re-enactment and 'living history' in public engagement and perceptions of the early medieval past has received limited attention and certainly very little in regards to dedicated published academic research (see Marzinzik 2011).

Many re-enactors themselves have long been aware of the largely untapped further potential of re-enactment activities and events to create rich connections between entertainment and education about the Early Middle Ages, especially when held in the vicinity of early medieval sites, monuments and landscapes. Public archaeologists have been slower to catch on. At the Offa's Dyke Centre event,

¹ <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2018/06/10/bringing-history-to-death-the-21st-century-funerals-of-richard-iii-to-aethelflaed-of-mercia/>

² <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/06/regia-anglorum-conference-west-kirby-and-horned-helmets/>; <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2019/02/25/richard-hall-symposium-2019-women-and-power-in-the-viking-world/>

³ <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2019/07/13/the-living-history-festival-at-the-offas-dyke-centre-knighton/>

⁴ <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2019/08/08/heysham-viking-festival-2019-reflections/>

the living history display was organised by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust's archaeologists and took place alongside a series of public talks in the Centre, and a guided walk along Offa's Dyke, so that together these activities showcased the early medieval history and archaeology of Offa's Dyke and its setting adjacent to, and alongside, the monument itself. Meanwhile, at the Heysham Viking Festival, there were stalls by the community archaeologist with the Morecombe Bay Partnership, as well as early medieval archaeologists and historians both involved in the re-enactment and in public talks and other educational activities including guided walks and a church guide, all centring on the surviving early medieval fabric and monuments at St Peter's church, and the adjacent early medieval St Patrick's chapel. At each location, the potential for further dimensions to public engagement during and between festivals and events is tangible.



Figure 1: Members of Cumbria living history group at an outdoor public-orientated event

Set against this backdrop, I took the opportunity of this book to interview two re-enactors who work together as part of the Cumbria group: SS and AP. I've come to know both of them since 2016 via academic conferences and re-enactment events, one of whom is also a professional archaeologist (AP). My questions are aimed to explore the relationship between public early medieval archaeologies and re-enactment, building on recent academic discussions of the value and challenges of re-enactment as a popular medium for engaging with the past through experience (Gardeła 2016; Kobiałka 2013; Johnson 2015).

Background (AP and SS)

Cumbria is a small living history group based in North West England and Southern Scotland. We are a new group, but formed from people who have been doing living history for many years. We currently have 13 members including adults and children, and a number of associate members. We are dedicated

to portraying the Kingdom of Strathclyde in the ninth to eleventh centuries AD, including the elites and common people of the kingdom and its lands, from the shores of Loch Lomond and the Clyde valley down to Cumbria. Our aim is to shed light on this lesser known early medieval kingdom using accurate reproduction artefacts as part of living history displays, talks, and presentations, to bring to life the people behind the pages of the history books, and what their world may have been like. We also aim, through experimental archaeology, to demonstrate how things worked and were made, and to let people have a go at these activities, as crafts and hands on participation are a very important part of our ethos (Figure 1).

We are two of the founder members of the group. We met at the first Heysham Viking Festival in 2016 and realised fairly quickly that we had a very similar philosophy to living history. We very quickly became friends and started sharing research, ideas, and doing more events together. Our families and existing re-enactment friends most closely aligned to our philosophies and ideas very quickly formed together, and became the basis for the living history group we run today. Our website contains information about our activities: it is linked from and to our Facebook and Twitter presence.⁵

Starting off in re-enactment

HW: When and how did each of you get into re-enactment?

SS: I grew up in north-west Cumbria and went to school in Bowness-on-Solway where the stone section of Hadrian's Wall ends. A group of Roman re-enactors were walking the course of the wall and as they finished it at our school they put on a display, which we all found very exciting. A few years later my parents took us to the Jorvik Centre during the holidays and when I got back to school I badgered the teacher about Vikings so much she set it as the summer topic. That got me hooked on history but Vikings didn't stick as my main interest until I saw a Viking re-enactment at Carlisle Castle and I eventually worked up the courage how to get involved. I was in and out of it for a while, but after I got married I found myself looking for work and my wife suggested it was a good time to get back into the hobby. It was something that kept me occupied, gave me focus and social interaction at a time when I felt isolated. I started off just doing the battle re-enactments, but over the years I got more involved in craft, Living History and educational aspects. By this time we were thinking about starting a family, and worrying about all the logistics involved in darting between the 'modern' campsite and the Living History encampment. We saw other families bringing their kids up in the hobby and using early medieval camping structures, so we decided to give it a go more seriously and made our own tent. Things grew from there.

AP: My first re-enactment event was in York, at Murton Park Museum of Farming in their 'Danelaw' village.⁶ A friend of mine asked if I would like to come to an event, before I was a student, about 20 years ago. I had always had an interest in History, as my parents took me to historical sites as a kid and that inspired my interest. I'd been to art college following school. I then applied to university to study media but didn't enjoy it and withdrew and took a year out. It was during this period when I went on my first re-enactment event. I was applying to go back to university, and this probably helped to focus my mind a bit and made me decide to study archaeology and history as a joint honours degree. Re-enactment and archaeology therefore developed together and have gone hand-in-hand ever since, one as a hobby, one as a profession.

HW: So we can say, Adam, that re-enactment and archaeology are branches from the same tree for you: a childhood interest in the past that led to a hobby and a profession. How did it develop over the years?

AP: The degree taught me a lot and I think I acquired a critical and questioning approach to the past and evidence: that was the most valuable thing I got from my degree. Having said that, I was also

⁵ www.cumbraland.com

⁶ www.murtonpark.co.uk

applying that critical approach in the re-enactment too, so again they went hand-in-hand as I developed my understanding about ancient technologies. Initially I was interested in the post-Roman period, and I still am, but because the re-enactment group I had become involved with was a late ninth-century one, I started to lean in that direction with my studies. In re-enactment, people often come from a perspective of how things ought to look according to established authorities; authenticity officers and established members of the group, and these are sometimes based on some quite old literature. As new members are often inexperienced and look to older members for guidance, this can lead to a stale or static idea of the past setting in, which results in a dogmatic approach within the group. Yet rather than taking for granted why we were doing the things we did, the way we did them, I was questioning more openly our choices of crafting early medieval artefacts and interpretations, and how we could improve on them.



Figure 2: An antler comb made by Adam of Blueaxe Reproductions (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

HW: So critical thinking from an archaeological degree – how we know what we know, and how we could do this differently – already created tensions with the re-enactment community?

AP: I don't want to overplay that, but ultimately yes; and I developed a critical approach to how the hobby should be conducted. As people get involved for a number of reasons, and all personalities are different, you find that some in a group were keen on the competitive combat aspects, others role playing, some music and storytelling, and others crafts and living history. Each group tends to focus around a few core members who like a particular aspect, and within larger groups this manifests itself too. Because I was interested in understanding material culture and crafts as part of that, I found there were often tensions with those with a different focus in their hobby, who were less interested about accuracy or reconstruction. For them it was maybe the competitive combat or role-playing and imaginative storytelling that was a central focus.

HW: Over these years, have you developed the career in archaeology and the hobby together, or have there been times when the hobby has ceased or taken a backseat.

AP: No, I don't think I've had a break at all in that time.

HW: when/how did it become a business more than a 'just' a hobby for each of you?

AP: A single instance did it for me. I've always made things for myself and a few friends, as I wanted my reproductions to be accurate and other people weren't making the items I wanted, or making them the way I wanted. Often you find, and particularly back then, that there were 2–3 designs of fancy copper-alloy buckle to choose from, but there were not the designs I wanted from the region I was

representing. Things like antler combs were hard to come by (Figure 2). A lot of stuff was more generic to fit a broad market. However, when people saw my stuff, they wanted the same, so I started to see an opportunity and I would make items to trade with people on a very small scale. However, the real turning point for me was when the early medieval cemetery at Cumwhitton was found and excavated by Oxford Archaeology North and I was involved in that professionally (Paterson *et al.* 2014). When we had published the book, the museum wanted to put the finds on display but the objects were so poorly preserved I suggested to the museum staff they would need reproductions to make sense of some of it. They agreed, but then came into my head that I wouldn't be happy with other people making these for them. This is not to say there aren't good craftspeople around, but I knew these items so intimately having worked on them for so long, and had already made some reproductions, so had worked out a lot of the processes. I also knew I could do a good job and ensure it was accurate (Figures 3 and 4). To do this, I had to set up a proper vehicle as this was a large contract and once I'd done that I decided I might as well keep doing it. So my reproduction business; Blueaxe Reproductions developed from here really.⁷



Figure 3: A sword from Cumwhitton made by Adam Parsons and Paul Binns (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

SS: About two years before I met Adam, I had bit of a mental health break, and during that time I focused on crafts and spending as much time as possible outdoors. Some friends of mine own a wood and they were managing it as a medieval coppiced woodland. It was fun and good exercise but we started sounding each other out about doing outdoor education with kids but we weren't quite ready at the time.

When I returned to work I was on fire, but just over a year later I were facing a redundancy situation. I didn't like the idea of fighting my friends for a job and I wasn't getting any younger, so I took the plunge. I had to do living history part-time whilst I took another job to support us, but then I went full-time last year. That second jump was a bit terrifying, but it's not going too badly! It'll be interesting to see how it develops, on the one hand I'm working with schools, outreach and workshops; and on the other there is the reproduction side of it with sales at festivals, fairs, markets and through the website. I also get specific

⁷ www.blueaxereproductions.com



Figure 4: A reproduction maplewood casket made by Adam Parsons of Blueaxe Reproductions on display at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

commissions. Both are seasonal activities, and so they dovetail with each other. Still, it's unclear which will become predominant over time. It's quite dynamic and a lot of people who do reproductions require an alternative source of income since it is unpredictable when orders will come in. Likewise with schools, one cannot be sure how much interest there will be in any given year. Doing both creates a balance even though both remain unpredictable.

HW: Stuart: both reproductions and school activities require public engagement, and at festivals like this you've been on the microphone commentating on the re-enactment battles on the field. In addition to these public engagements and public speaking: are you still doing the fighting?

SS: I haven't in a while, but I need to get back into fighting to get a bit more exercise. A lot of my early medieval wardrobe is getting a little tight around the middle! I try to do a range of activities from craft to combat, but I am more interested in engagement and education these days.

Interactions between Archaeology and Re-enactment

HW: Turning back to Adam, I want to discuss the relationship between re-enactment activities – your hobby and business, and archaeology. Are the lines blurred?

AP: To be honest there was quite a lot of overlap. For instance; for the Cumwhitton project I was doing the finds illustrations of the artefacts as my day-job and writing about them, and then came home and I was making the reproductions of the objects in the evening to help me understand them. The buckles from the graves I was able to replicate to confirm the process of tinning, and how the ring-and-dots and boss-capped rivets worked (Figure 5). So there was a very important and constructive interface in operation by looking at the objects and the reproductions simultaneously. It was an iterative process that informed both the reproductions and sincerely changed the report itself.

HW: So for Adam it developed out of a degree and career in archaeology, which fostered the synergy. For Stuart, the path was different, how have you developed your accessing academic discussions and debates about the Early Middle Ages as you have participated in re-enactment?



Figure 5: Experimenting with methods and techniques of tinning and ring-and-dot decoration to match those found on the archaeological examples at Cumwhitton (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

SS: Initially, I was getting a lot of my understanding from popular history books, the Internet and other re-enactors, but about 10 years ago I became more aware of research coming out of academia and I realised that some things we were doing or saying were not fully in keeping with 21st-century perspectives on the Early Middle Ages. The Internet has become a much more reliable and important source of information, with open-access publications on sites like Academia.edu, academics sharing links to their articles on there and elsewhere through Twitter and Facebook, and blogs like *Archaeodeath* (Williams 2013–), *Norse & Viking Ramblings* (Jesch 2008–) and *Berserkjablog* (Dale 2011–). In terms of books: Alex Woolf (2007) and Clare Downham's (2008) work was very important for exploring early medieval northern Britain beyond old-fashioned and limited material about the 'Vikings'. Now with online booksellers you get suggestions based on your reading history, so you're able to catch books that have a small limited run before they go out of print, and I've even picked up a few announced by academics on their social media feeds. Then I met Adam and things went insane from there.

AP: Absolutely, and Dr Fiona Edmonds' work on the North West deserved mentioning too (e.g. Edmonds 2015).

The Interactions between Archaeology and Re-enactment

HW: So how did this tension between archaeological research and common re-enactment practice manifest itself? Were there tensions in conversations or was it only in hindsight you perceived these?



Figure 6: A scale reproduction of a silk hood from Dublin showing a possible method of wearing it (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

AP: It was little things I experienced over time. For example, I would ask: ‘why are we using plywood shields since there is no evidence for its use in the British Isles’ and the answer was, and still is the vast majority of groups in the UK, that ‘we can easily and cheaply buy or make these’. I found a supplier of limewood and poplar timber planks to enable us to make more accurate shields, but many were against this, or found excuses why it still wasn’t accurate enough, so why bother. I couldn’t understand these objections at first, as surely moving towards greater accuracy was better, and presumed that everyone would want to move to become more accurate. It was only with time I realised that, ultimately the shield was only a prop for some them to be used and damaged in their competitive combat or their role play, and whilst they wouldn’t want to say openly ‘I don’t want to be that accurate’ (and there is nothing wrong with that; this is a hobby after all), that is what it boiled down to. How early medieval shields may have been made, or functioned, and thus how they could have looked when new and when used, learning about past technologies and their afterlives, basically weren’t what they were engaged in the hobby for primarily.

HW: Was that the only area of tension though, were there those also interested in crafting, but who took a different attitude?

AP: Not massively. I found that people interested in the crafts might have had different opinions or approaches, but they shared my genuine interest in learning how to make things in a comparable manner to past people rather than just their subsequent use at events and exhibitions. However, one thing you do see a lot of is those who try to *improve* upon the past. For example, I replicate an archaeological find, not just a generic artefact type. In doing so, I learn how it was made and perhaps also how it was used. In contrast, there are those that don't like the aesthetic or functionality of a past object from their present-day perspective, so they change it to suit how they perceive it should look or function.

The silk and wool hoods from the British Isles are good examples of our desire to adapt what we know to actually suit modern aesthetics. There is one hood known from York, another from Lincolnshire, and several from Dublin (Wincott Heckett 2003). They are tiny, and don't sit on adult heads as we perceive a hood should. Consequently, re-enactors frequently make them bigger so they fit on adult heads and cover the whole head, covering all the hair, as that is how they believed they should be worn. They reckon that we have only ever found children's ones, and that is why they are small: they are inferring the former existence of adult ones that we simply have no evidence for. However, I started questioning: perhaps we are not wearing them right, since there are numerous examples from various sites, and they are all small. Were they actually for children or alternatively what if they were actually adult dress items? Have we have mistakenly modified them to meet our expectations? So rather than change it, myself and my wife Emma made some to replicate the items we actually have from the archaeological record and tried to understand how they could be used by adults. We discovered many are not sewn fully up the back, like a proper hood, but are open, so they at least could not function like the re-enactors were using them. Instead, we found they could be worn as a head covering which covered most of the top and back of the head (Figure 6). Emma often knots her long hair out of the back, as seen on a number of early medieval pendants depicting women. This slit up the back of some of them is also very useful for that too. We can't claim to be any more correct in our final interpretation, but we are sticking closer to the evidence that we currently possess provided by the archaeological record. In this regard, we are also very honest when talking to the public about what this evidence is, and how we have had to interpret it.

Another example of the problems created by adapting the archaeological record to fit modern uses and aesthetics comes from early medieval swords, and their hilts in particular. The original sword hilts are usually quite small: 8–9 cm long. In contrast, most re-enactment swords are made with 10–14cm hilts, so the combatants can wear gloves to protect their fingers and still hold the swords as they believe they should be held. They also make them out of modern spring steels and grind them very light with power tools, and also blunt the blades and round them off, for safety (which is of course paramount). However, they will then often tell members of the public in great detail what these weapons would have been like to fight with. Yet, they have changed the object in significant ways from how an early medieval sword would have appeared and how it would have been used. The effect is that we cannot confidently draw many conclusions from such objects. Consequently, I decided early on that I wanted to make accurate sharp and semi-sharp weapons to display and trial, alongside the blunts for 'show fighting', and it is something we now do in our group Cumbraland, and there are a growing number of people keen on this approach too. What I have found is that, even though I have quite big hands, I can hold these smaller sword handles comfortably when the correct hilt profile is used, and sometimes differing hand positions. This can in turn give better insight into how swords may have been held and used in combat.

So, whilst many re-enactors are often interested in crafting, rather than making an object as an exact copy, to understand the process of making an early medieval artefact, or its function, they're changing the parameters to fit their specific uses that disconnect from the early medieval finds we have. From an experimental archaeology perspective: if you haven't replicated that object exactly, you can't learn from it.



Figure 7: A living history event at Moor Forge (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

HW: So, there is a difference between craft and performance, but there is a performance in the making, surely. So, as with watching flint knapping, what you are referring to isn't a tension between crafting and storytelling, it is about the different kinds of story we wish to convey about past people?

AP: Yeah, sometimes perhaps, but there is usually not a clear acknowledgement that this is the case, so there is a danger of misrepresenting information. Craftspeople, or artists, working like this are employing an impulse that people in the past presumably had; to create something new and improve on things. However, living history cannot be like that, since we are recreating aspects of the past, but we are coming at it from a very different perspective due to modern technology, materials, and knowledge. The limitations on us are very different from those in the past. So the creative impulse is fine, but we can be creative with technology now in ways that are easy, but would have been difficult in the past.

It is also important to point out as part of this that the circumstances we set off to make reproductions from is very different. Those producing items for the re-enactment market are doing so in a modern market environment. In this context we can readily obtain raw materials like silver, copper-alloy, textiles, and timber, and cast and cut these very simply with modern technology, but that wasn't so easy in the past. They didn't have centrifugal casting, latex moulds, modern forges and gas torches, nice electric kilns, or angle-grinders and other power tools to mention just a few of our modern benefits. Things were a lot more labour or time intensive; even the production of charcoal for a forge or kiln would be labour intensive. However, technology has saved us this labour cost, and labour costs are one of the biggest contrasts between past and present production. These advances mean that we end up with a lot of distorted representations in re-enactment; a lot of re-enactors will use cast objects, like belt fittings that can be made very cheaply, often overseas. Objects we have good evidence for in the past, like bone and antler items, or hand-fabricated belt fittings are less prevalent, as whilst the materials for these are cheap, there is often less ability to cut corners with the production so they are still largely

hand crafted. As a result, modernity has not saved us much time with their construction. The net result on a re-enactment market place is a simple bone belt buckle which was presumably a modest item in the past, can end up being multiple times more expensive than a fancy copper-alloy cast one, therefore you see a skewed representation of these items' value and prevalence.

HW: I want to ask you next about the importance of accessible academic, specifically archaeological, information given that most academics and academic libraries, let alone others, cannot afford the books. So the links on social media make you feel linked into to these debates?

SS: Social media makes this relatively easy and possible, yes. It's weird because my perspective as a practitioner of re-enactment is that we take bits of information and we read to a higher level than we'll ever put out to the public. I see myself as a conduit of academic information to a wider audience. You'll sometimes hear in re-enactment communities and forums people saying 'oh academics don't know what they're talking about', but then these re-enactors are taking their information from academic sources as well, but they are academics who died 50 years ago! Over the last few years, I've been surprised how eagerly re-enactors can get accepted by academics and professionals and the barriers are more imagined than real. Obviously I feel a bit of a fraud, but I've experienced a lot of openness from academics, both online and in person.



Figure 8: Cumbraland living history group members at a Govan Stones open day event (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

Re-enactment as Public Engagement

HW: So the need for a museum display was a synergy of Adam's archaeological expertise and reproduction crafting. Can you give a sense of the range of ways you deploy your re-enactment knowledge and skills in public engagement (schools, festivals and other events/contexts).

AP: I do re-enactment events; including festivals just like this one here at Heysham and usually I will do several of these each year. Sometimes they'll be in a field with a camp like this, and for a range of clients. These clients range from community groups to parks and heritage venues, as well as living history destinations such as Moor Forge in Cumbria⁸ (Figure 7) or the aforementioned Danelaw village at Murton Park Museum of Farming. These can be big multi-group events like Heysham, or smaller ones with just

⁸ www.moorforge.co.uk



Figure 9: Running a craft 'have-a-go' workshop for the University of Nottingham (Photograph: Emma Parsons)

our group Cumbraland. Our group also does events for museums and other historic sites, like churches. This last year we did a book launch at St Michael's Church in Workington, where I gave a talk on the findings of the excavation and a book launch on the Friday evening with my archaeologists hat on. Then, on the Saturday and Sunday, we set our living history gear up and explained to visitors to the church about early medieval life, and related those finding I had discussed to the living history we were displaying. We also work a lot with Govan Old church where we do displays and activities within it (Figure 8), which are linked to the early medieval stone sculpture on display there and the part of the sites history they represent.⁹

Both myself individually, and the Cumbraland group collectively, also do similar things in museum galleries to support exhibitions. Recently I have worked with the Lakeside Arts Centre at Nottingham to support the 'Vikings: Rediscover the Legend'¹⁰ touring exhibition, and the Centre for the Study of the Viking Ages 'Bringing the Vikings back to the East Midlands'¹¹ (Figure 9), and I'll also be at the Harris Museum in Preston in a month, and in

all these instances we are usually demonstrating crafts and talking about material culture in the early medieval period.

I also go to universities to give talks with reproductions to history and archaeology departments or to have a stand during conferences and symposia. Sometimes, I will just have reproductions on display, others I will do an archaeology talk and then a hands-on session with the reproductions. For examples, I usually go up to Lancaster University yearly to talk to Dr Fiona Edmonds' students. They are History students, and I will often talk about a site and the material culture there, and then we will look at reproductions and talk about regional patterns and trends and how some of this could link to historical or place-name evidence, and how all of this has a complex relationship to people in the past.

The students seem to enjoy it, and I think it helps to contextualise the past for them, and make it less abstract. It also helps to demonstrate visually the distinction between different material cultures. We had a great talk recently about ringed pins, which often get termed 'Hiberno-Norse' and whilst they

⁹ www.thegovanstones.org.uk/

¹⁰ <https://www.lakesidearts.org.uk/exhibitions/event/3537/viking-rediscover-the-legend.html>

¹¹ <https://emidsvikings.ac.uk/about-the-project/>

undoubtedly come from Ireland originally, and the Vikings do seem to like them, they are actually a regional fashion by the tenth century, so sometimes terminology like ‘Hiberno-Norse’ which gets used a lot in literature, can be unhelpful when thinking about them. This conversation was prompted by me having lots of reproduction ringed pins, and pointing out the distribution of their find spots, and the variety and diversity of sites they are found at.

HW: So a lot of your work is with small groups, regardless of venue at festivals, churches and heritage sites. Through detailed conversations about and with the replica items, you question some of the broad-brush generalisations. It sounds as if you are trying to challenge stereotypes and categorisations of the period. Do you find such stereotypes prevalent among the public?

AP: I understand it’s a human impulse to simplify things and I see it as a challenge to reverse that and reintroduce a little more nuance and complexity. One thing I hear a lot is that you need to simplify ideas for kids; I disagree completely. Children are able to entertain very complex ideas about material culture and the human past more broadly. For example, last year I went to the Isle of Man for Tynwald and took part in the Viking school’s day they host. The structure was that there were 6–7 of us set up around a living history camp, myself, Stuart, and several others. Then we had groups of 10–12 school children rotate through during the day to spend 15 minutes with each school group teaching them something about the Viking Age, and we did this all day. We did a short presentation/demonstration with the living history kit and then they moved onto another table. So I sat with them and demonstrated manufacturing belt buckles in the Irish Sea region in the Early Middle Ages, which are quite distinctive (Figures 10 and 11). I showed how they made the decoration on sheet metal belts and the sorts of motifs this can produce. Once I had done that, I gave them 7–8 belts, 5–6 from the Irish Sea region, and two from further afield. I then asked them to identify where they had come from, in effect asking them make a simple typological identification, suggesting which were made in the Irish Sea region and which ones were made elsewhere. They did this perfectly, and then we muddled the waters by talking about trade, and fashions, and how you do sometimes find object-types and styles that are not local and show long-distance contacts, and sometimes we find items that might have been deliberately imported, as well as copies of this style of find made elsewhere, all of which they grasped quite easily. From trade we brought in silk and silver, including an Arabic dirham and using this linked out to a wider Viking World that the Isle of Man was connected to. So, with a few belts, some silk, scales, and a dirham, we were able to talk about local identity, regionalism, trade, and the breadth of the Viking world to school children in only 15 minutes. All this discussion derived from handling, recognising and identifying this small assemblage of reproduction belts.

HW: What about your work with primary schools?

AP: I don’t go into many primary schools any more, just one or two a year, as it isn’t part of my core business, and it is very hard work; Stuart does this work though!

SS: I find kids in schools to be very receptive and highly insightful. You don’t need to ‘dumb it down’, just make it accessible and relatable. In one school, an autistic child was playing on a lyre and commented how quiet an instrument it was. Before long we were questioning whether everyone was silent when it was played, or whether it was only meant to be heard by a small select audience, which got us on to talking about the value that would have been placed on accessing a talented storyteller or musician. That all came from handling a reproduction artefact, and the use of tactility is one of the techniques I’ve used in training sessions since I was a student. A lot of the other techniques come from my professional background in training and management, so I make sessions as hands-on and interactive as possible. I basically run it as a day-long coaching session, but with Viking-period themes and reproduction artefacts as my tools, rather than traditional office-based materials and techniques.



Figure 10: A collection of Irish-sea style bossed belt fittings (Photograph: Adam Parsons)



Figure 11: Teaching school children about belt styles on the Isle of Man (Photograph: Stuart Strong)

Digital Engagement

HW: Above, we talked about how social media has facilitated dialogue with academic research, but let's now return to it to address how it supports your re-enactment activities. Outline your uses of social media to support and extend your craft and other activities: does social media work? Alternately, what doesn't work digitally?

AP: Definitely from the business side, it helps hugely. Putting up pictures of the objects I am making online on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, is really important. Unlike many businesses I don't just put up images of the final artefacts, but instead, I talk about the research and production process, showing me at work with the artefacts I'm trying to replicate. I'm even happy to post images of some of the work in progress. A lot of people say I shouldn't do this since it gives away 'trade secrets'. To be honest, I'm not really giving away secrets from a few images, and my focus for doing all of this isn't primarily on making money, which frankly isn't going to happen through this anyway, but I like to think I am helping educate and share information, and in doing so I am showing that I am working diligently to make reproductions correctly or explaining the nuance in some interpretations. Many other producers will use social media, but as an end-of-process description such as 'a sword from Poland from the 10th century' but honestly, that superficial level of information tells us next to nothing and who cares? It's the crafting process that reveals so much for audiences and we can explain why it matters and show how we are drawing on archaeological finds directly and in detail in our work. Likewise, I share articles from academia on my business page when they are pertinent or of interest. Some of the feedback I have had suggests that this has possibly helped me to create my profile for my business as a source of accuracy and honesty, but I don't know that for certain. I mostly use still images, but I do occasionally use videos.

Regarding videos, we've found this a very effective tool for demonstrating some craft techniques. With our group Cumbraland we did a video of our group member, Amy, spinning from with a drop spindle and then she came up with a technique of



Figure 12: Amy's drop spindle and thread (Photograph: Stuart Strong)

plying. We shared that on our social media pages¹² (Figure 12). It got shared through social media quite a bit, and not just among those who were interested in history, but also among some textile enthusiast hobby groups.

SS: That's right; you reach people you wouldn't ordinarily reach and cultivate networks; people come to us who might not always engage in the craft and the study and interest in the Early Middle Ages. That video of Amy using the drop-spindle at Moor Forge probably got more online engagements than people who actually saw it live that day.

AP: Regarding Stuart's point on networks, we are hoping off the back of that to attend Woolfest next year as a living history group.¹³ This is a festival primarily focused on wool crafts from commercial sellers to hobbyists, but hopefully we can bring some heritage insights to this event as well!

Personally, I don't post that regularly on social media, like many people I tend to post in fits and starts. I've asked people about this and some people appreciate having a break from it for a while, so they don't feel inundated with it. I'm sure it is not optimal from a maximising impact point of view, but it depends on what you want out of social media. I think posting with some regularity and getting good information out into the wider audiences is my core focus.

HW: Many academics are critical of social media, saying we only reach people who know you already, but you have a different experience, Stuart?

SS: Yes, social media audiences are very different – Twitter, Instagram and Facebook in particular. Twitter is used more by schools, whereas Instagram is for those who are more visual, and Facebook is particularly events-orientated. Together, you reach contrasting sets of people. So I put some bone pin photographs online, including a photo of a friend with a bone hairpin in her hair. I shared it with her permission and an academic in the US shared it across her networks. As a result, I got commissions from people in the States for hairpins. These are people who would never otherwise have seen my craft. It isn't about mass-consumption, but about meeting different people who would otherwise not engage and some acquire a niche interest in what we do.

Re-enactment and the media

HW: What about the media more broadly (TV documentaries, news stories etc.)?

AP: I've been involved in TV in various ways, both in front of and behind the camera. This has been for documentaries, as well as being involved in making props for television dramas. For example, I made the comb that Ubba uses to groom his beard in Season 1 of *The Last Kingdom* (2015). Frequently, dramas just want things off the peg, and have very basic understanding of what they need. However, I won't provide a production with something bad, but with something accurate to the time they are depicting, even if they are expecting something different. Sometimes when you are involved in a TV production in more detail, you can influence the direction of things a little, but mostly we make little difference to scripts and broader costume sets. Sadly, this is why many costume and set designs can range far from acceptable historical evidence. However, if I do get the opportunity to be involved, I usually do, because by being there, I hope to be able to influence some aspects a little, maybe prevent productions opting for something far removed from the archaeological record. Going back to documentaries, I was recently heavily involved in *Britain's Viking Graveyard* aired on Channel Four and focusing on the Great Heathen Army at Repton and the field investigations of Dr Cat Jarman.¹⁴

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/Cumbraland/videos/858558571168308/>

¹³ <https://www.woolfest.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/britains-viking-graveyard>

SS: I think it's important and I've done little bits here and there, including an interview by Michelle McManus on STV when I was at an event at Lanark. I was sat with other re-enactors from other groups including Romans and a First World War soldier. So I've done TV interviews and work with students doing documentaries, and hopefully I aim to get my own YouTube channel sorted out.

HW: I'd like to ask Stuart about the YouTube channel idea.

SS: I regard it as another potential weapon in the arsenal: it has a different profile and, to be honest with you, there is so much on there of questionable quality, including pseudo-science and flat-earthers. Many channels aren't particularly educational on YouTube. This isn't just my impression, schools have told me many times how few educational videos there are on YouTube for them to use to support their learning about the Viking Age. One of my ideas for it is to get the things I can't do but would be useful for schools to show before, after or during, our activities. They might even be able to use them in lieu of our presence if funds are tight, so they can see videos of material that they wouldn't normally deal with in detail. So it's digital territory we need to claim and engage with living history as well as real-world events and activities!

Scale and character of public engagement

HW: What can you tell me about the scale of the audiences you reach of your real-world and digital engagements?

AP: With regards to public interactions at festivals like this one, we do 2–3 per year and each involves meeting 500–2,000 people over a day or two, and then there will be one or two big events of 5–10,000 people. These are not as large as say the 60,000 people who visit the Jorvik Viking Festival (which we also attend), but those events are less focused so it is hard to say of those people engaged with certain aspects of the event. That is also the case with us too, to some extent. It is difficult to judge how many people we engage with at events like this at Heysham, which we have been told has had an estimated 8–10,000 people over the two day event over the last few years. Our small group definitely talks to many hundreds of those visitors in some fashion, and then I organise some periphery activities for the festival, such as the evening lectures – a pair of talks by Viking specialists in St Peter's church – attracting 80–100 attendees too. Moving onto other audiences I speak to 60–70 University students per year and probably one or two primary school classes.

In terms of online activity, my personal pages are followed by a few thousand people. There are people engaged in living history with huge numbers of followers, but not all of them are of the highest standard. But there are some who are doing very high quality work and getting much larger followings such as Marobud¹⁵ who have 10,000 Facebook followers and Wulfheodenas who have 25,000 Facebook followers.¹⁶ Overall, I try not to worry too much about numbers. This is, primarily a hobby, and as a group, as well as personally, we aim to have a higher impact on people and spend more time with visitors, and not worry about how many we might see. In fact, when dealing with larger crowds, it can become a bit impersonal and the educational side suffers. In addition, a lot of what I aim to achieve with my own personal output is focused more as trickle-down content, rather than me personally trying to hit a large numbers of eyeballs. I hope if I can inform and enthuse enough people in the right places, this will carry on beyond what I personally can do.

One challenge Cumbraland has as a group in this regard is that we represent a little-known Brythonic kingdom that isn't thought of as being as cool and popular as more mainstream Viking or early Anglo-Saxon stuff. It is a challenge we have deliberately taken on of course, because we think it should

¹⁵ www.facebook.com/marobud

¹⁶ www.facebook.com/Wulfheodenas



Figure 13: Cumbraland living history group branding

be better known as part of our region's heritage, but that is the obstacle none the less. As a group we have a good working relationship with Govan Old who curate the amazing collection of early medieval stone sculptural material related to the early medieval kingdom of Strathclyde, and have discussed the challenges of making an impact, particularly in social media impact, whilst also retaining the integrity of your historical site or message.¹⁷ It is easier to use imagery around 'Vikings' to get people to attend events, because they think they know what that is, and it has an understood brand and appeal (however accurate or otherwise) and people want to come to these events. Our challenge is to try to popularise the Kingdom of Strathclyde in a similar way, to create a visual images and a brand that excites and stimulates people to want to come along, without diluting the integrity of the historical evidence. Some of the marketing we've done in terms of cosmetic appearance has tried to work towards that, using motifs off the stones at Govan to create a 'brand', without just resorting to the 'Vikings' tropes (Figure 13).

SS: I'm now getting to the stage where I get a lot of interest. I used to get a few 'likes' on Facebook, but now I'm putting stuff on periodically, and over the last year it can get 50–60 engagements for each photo. There are also a lot of comments going on to it and more interest. Facebook attracts more comments, while Instagram tends to be passive, but it is a newer thing for me and it is building too.

HW: What about the *kinds* of people you engage via your craft and performances?

AP: With my archaeological hat on, it is generally people from wealthier backgrounds, older usually, and with a quite high level of formal education. However, on the living history side it is far more varied mix of formal education level, economic status, and age, particularly of course children. The events we have done at Govan and Heysham, for example, have a very enthused but different demographic. Because of the economic circumstances often these people are less likely to be attending lectures, conferences, or symposia, due to a number of factors; awareness of it occurring, fees to entry, or simply that it is during weekdays/evenings when they are working or looking after children. They are, however, often able to come to events on a Saturday or Sunday particularly when they are free and family-friendly, and thus have no barrier to entry, and are heavily promoted in local venues and on social media, and local social media sites. This successfully breaks down a lot of those barriers. These audiences are frequently likely to have got their knowledge from TV or historical fiction, so this is a great opportunity to correct some of the inaccuracies that those genres inevitably create, and inspire a passion to find out more. There are often lots of other things going on at such events,

¹⁷ www.thegovanstones.org.uk

so if there is someone in the family who is interested in history, and others who are not, they can all find something to entertain them with the range of things on display, making it more likely they will attend as a family.

SS: Here at Heysham it seems to be everyone in the town showing up to look around and enjoy the festival. When we did the first one here, there were people from the settlement thanking me for coming and saying they look forward to seeing me next time without any prompting. So it is a big impact here: it's usually only other re-enactors that say that! It was inspiring! Likewise, we did a show earlier on the year at Govan for the Govan Stones Project. Some people coming along had been following Adam or myself as well as ex-archaeologists and people engaged in heritage, but there were also ordinary local people from off the street who had no idea what the place was like. So it is far beyond the standard archaeological audience of white middle-class mature-elderly individuals, but a far-broader spectrum. There's another one I did at Govan as part of the Govan Science Festival in order to expose the stones to a far wider audience. Again, by doing this, it attracted a lot of people who had a very different background and might not have been otherwise interested in the Early Middle Ages.

HW: How easy is it to get feedback? What do people 'take away' from your sessions? What do they say and how do you know what people get from it?

AP: It is really tough. We get a lot of feedback that is positive on social media, or people telling you how much they enjoyed it, and of course repeat visitors which is usually a good side, but it would be hard to quantify. It is easier to get anecdotal feedback from the students at University: since they are a small group and they will often tell me personally afterwards, or their tutors who pass the information on. I also have an online audience whom I am quite engaged with, and they give good feedback, some of whom regularly come to events to see us.

SS: It is rock-hard to find out. It's easier with schools because you can directly ask for feedback. Given teachers are so busy, I usually try to get their feedback via a debrief at the end of the day, and ideally periodically through the day. So I can hear immediately what the kids liked and what they didn't appreciate. It's more difficult to get substantive criticism, but I persist and I can get it through direct conversations with teachers especially. Fortunately, when I do extract constructive comments, it usually relates to a small aspect, but it still helps me to improve. Most of the criticism is a little bit about pace (too fast, too slow). It's a challenge, especially when we are including children with ADHD and ASD and those with different learning speeds, plus often activities involving multiple year-groups. I really like it when you get a situation where a student engages and really enjoys it, and the teacher says 'he never engages, he mucks around' and you realise you've made a connection to someone who doesn't normally want to learn.

HW: Is there snobbery and pushback from the public regarding your activities and sessions?

AP: A little bit but nothing massive, compared with academic disciplines like runology and Old Norse religion: those seem to be areas where some sections of the public can be quite hostile due to personal beliefs or convictions, and these are perhaps the most contentious areas. I think this is often more of an issue as your audience grows.

SS: I could imagine this could happen, but honestly I've never really had it very much. On social media, I've likewise never had a problem. I sometimes have to listen to crazy theories and bizarre comments, but no really negative experiences. I must say the only situations where people stare at me in public is because I've come back from a school and gone out to a shop and find people gawping at my early medieval clothing (I had forgotten to change out of my 'work clothes').

HW: But what about specialists? Is there snobbery and pushback from archaeologists (does it vary between academics, government/museum, commercial and other fields)?

AP: It's a mixed bag. There is some snobbery from academia, but also some of the people who have supported me the most are respected academics. Professors Judith Jesch and James Graham-Campbell as well as Dr Fiona Edmonds, Dr Christina Lee, and Cat Jarman, are supportive and included me in some projects. I have, however, met some historians who think that what we do is a complete waste of time. Archaeologists less so as they deal with material culture and there has been a resurgence of interest in experimental archaeology of late.

SS: Again, I've only had positive experiences and that academics and professionals are absolutely delighted there is someone interested in what they do/their subject and are keen to talk about it, including academics those already mentioned above. Dr Roderick Dale (University of Nottingham), and Dr Luke Murphy (University of Iceland) deserve mention because they presented public talks at the 2019 Heysham Viking Festival. So Viking-period scholars have been very positive.

HW: In response to Adam, is that because some historians think archaeology is a waste of time, or just specifically re-enactors?

AP: I think that would depend on the individual; most the historians I know personally are very supportive, but then that is probably why I am friends with them. The less positive instances I am thinking of were from historians at conferences. Once instance involved an individual whom I had seen be derisive about my stall, and afterwards I'd witnessed their academic paper which had some relevance to some of the things I had on display. During a later break I was able to engage with them about this, and explain a few things we had discovered from making and using an item they mentioned in their talk. The individual seemed very enthused and we had, I think, an interesting conversation, and I like to think I changed their mind about what we do. However, that was a positive turn around, there are a few whose default position is that 'dressing up is silly' and something to be distanced from. Most of our conflict and negativity is from interactions with other re-enactors, as across our hobby there are very different philosophies and approaches.

SS: There are clear differences between commercial excavations and most desk-/library-based academics, but that's mainly because different interests exist, not different levels of interaction or engagement. I've gone into this without a chip on my shoulder and I've had nothing back. I've had very positive conversations with historians like Dr Charles Insley and archaeologists including Professor James Graham-Campbell. At the 2018 Vikings in Scotland conference in Glasgow conference we had some very positive interactions with archaeologists relating to our reconstructions on the Ballinaby shields as part of a larger insular shield project.

HW: So from what Adam says, there are as much tensions within the hobby as without?

AP: Yes, and I think this is because we generally engage more on this topic on a personal level with individuals within the hobby than with people from outside it. There is more interaction between re-enactors, than between re-enactors and academics. I don't think this will change quickly: we don't get many archaeologists coming to re-enactment events, and it is a mixed bag with whether early medieval re-enactors engage with the literature or not, although articles hosted online on open-access sites, and some of the public symposia and conferences that have been taking place in the last 5 years or so have helped with this.

SS: I supposed there have always been disagreements within groups on how best to portray the past, but it's perhaps been amplified more over the last few years with members of different groups from all over the world interacting on various social media sites. It can get a bit heated, but there's nothing like healthy and vigorous debate.

The significance and controversies of re-enactment

HW: Why does this matter in the 21st century, for us to engage the public with the early medieval past?

SS: From a school's perspective, I could do any period and I could teach the kids the same lessons. This is because the curriculum is like a series of company values around buzz words informed by soft competencies. Vikings can fit into almost all of this, from maths to languages, crafts and design technology to history. So the fact is that the early medieval period is considered 'sexy' and 'engaging' and therefore it will hopefully inspire them. If we have the up-to-date research rather than old-fashioned culture-historic (perhaps in turn built on racist) interpretations, then they will be growing up with a framework for further learning. So any identities they build on the past might be better informed and less anachronistic and chauvinistic.

AP: With the Cumbria group specifically I think it is important to engage with this conversation about identity, because using poorly understood notions about past identities to reinforce modern ones, or even create them, is a current issue. Because our group is based around a little known Brythonic kingdom in the late ninth and tenth century, which seems to have straddled modern day North West England and Scotland, it doesn't fit with current political agendas, particularly the preconceived ideas some people have about the past, so this is an opportunity to open up this discussion. In Scotland, we find that the story a lot of people talk about focuses a lot on notions on the Gaelic origins of Scotland, and the story of a Brythonic past often doesn't sit comfortably into what people think occurred. Likewise, neither does it fit into notions of 'England' in Cumbria. So we have an opportunity to point out that past identities were much more complex, with multiple languages being spoken in the region, which we hope helps people to see more critically crude attempts to fabricate homogeneous modern national identities. National and regional museums both side of the border often don't tell the stories of cultures and people which slip between the cracks, like that of Strathclyde, so it is something we hope to help with.

I also hope we can help to temper the notions that the past is always better. It sounds a counter intuitive thing, but 'Vikings' particularly are too often idealised, and the notion of them as idealised ancestors is used so often to justify modern beliefs and prejudices and ways of doing things. If we can put 'inconvenient' stories about the past in the spotlight; slavery and murder for example, I hope we can add some complexity to the story again, and help to temper that idealisation.

HW: The same ideas of a shared past and senses of identity that we use as archaeologists to foster an inclusive sense of shared culture, but others will use the same terminology to exclude and foster their extreme viewpoints. But do we need re-enactments that tackle disturbing and unfamiliar dimensions? Take the swastika symbol (see Sturtevant 2017; Mondschein 2018); there has been a controversy surrounding its use by re-enactors, but shouldn't we use these early medieval manifestations of a symbol to foster discussions about these appropriations, rather than hide them from view?

AP: We do have copies of some of the tablet-woven brocades with swastikas upon them. I believe that we have a duty to replicate objects as we find them, and then talk about it and discuss its uses, and as you say subsequent appropriations. We are very open about that. Of course we are sensitive, and will not go out of our way to upset people or parade in them as if it isn't an issue. We are always very clear about its uses and misuses, but we have never had a member of the public complain about our approach or attitude. Indeed, many have been very supportive of this including war survivors and their families. From a modern perspective, there are items that might be deemed offensively represented, though few give much of a thought to the mock murdering going on the living history 'battlefields'. However, I think it is my responsibility to show the differences between past and present, but to also be clear that explain my world view is not supported, or contingent upon, the past at all. Living history is not about wishing to perpetuate past lifestyles and values, but to explore and educate us about them. I am very clear that I don't impose a modern reading of the material onto the object.

HW: But many would say that it doesn't matter what you *meant* by it, it is the fact that someone might be offended and it is now your/our problem. I respect that to a degree but should the past be sugar-coated?

AP: I respect that too, but I don't believe we should tamper with the past to placate a modern audience when it relates to symbols and material culture. I'll reiterate that we don't want to offend people, and we make an effort not to do that, but we also have a duty to not sanitise the past to make history more palatable to the public; I think this directly feeds into some of the problems about fantasising the past and identity that we discussed above. We also have to talk about slavery, and murder, and other awful things that occurred in the past too, and we have to avoid overtly manipulating the past to indulge modern fantasies. Indeed, I think this is just where some of the current dangers lie. Some re-enactment groups, particularly in America, are more based around pageantry or role-play and such, so I can see why these controversies have become an issue there. Therefore, it's important to stress that my comments here are not attempting to comment on that situation: they are just directed at the serious education-focused living history that we do, and not all re-enactment or re-enactors.

HW: But how do we make it matter then, if we make that distinction? If we are telling people 'this isn't about you', how can we expect people to engage with it?

AP: I don't think it's about saying 'this isn't about you' quite like that. We can engage people with understanding aspects of a shared past, how complex and interesting it is, and of course enjoy the good bits, but we should talk about the bad bits too, and I think we do need to be clear about distancing the past from the present with regard to our current behaviour. I just don't think we need to sanctify the past, or our presentation of it.

HW: There are hilarious nested hypocrisies in our society when most of our Hollywood popular culture is about anti-heroes that do despicable things in fictional environments that we aren't supposed to replicate, yet when it comes to historical genres which are equally about storytelling, we are denounced. Have you been criticised for being complicit in the values and beliefs of past people because you study them?

AP: Usually the most controversial thing I get involved in are discussions about gender roles in early societies. In the early medieval period there seems to have been quite firm notions of normative behaviour for gender roles with regards to economic and social activities, duties and warfare. With the discovery that the Birka Bj581 weapon burial was a female (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017), I have seen an opportunity to address this afresh. I thought the research added an interesting aspect, and incorporated it into the conversation at shows. However, many people went to extremes with this; either Viking women were warriors if they wanted to be, or looking for every excuse to say that the bones were wrong, or that weapons don't make a warrior. Of course the latter is a valid point, and it is a point many archaeologists have been saying for years, but what struck me was how passionate they were about it; why did it matter so much to them? Of course I realised that they were doing what I describe above; building their modern identities around those of the past, which meant they both had a vested interest in one outcome or the other. There is more work currently being undertaken by my friend Dr Leszek Gardela on this topic (2013, 2018), and I dare say that the controversy will arise again. However, I continued to incorporate this information into my conversation, and present it as what it is; inconclusive information pertaining to a small number of burials, but I do get comments from both sides accusing me of either being some form of woolly minded liberal thinking that regards the past is all fairies and unicorns, or else as some kind of closed-minded establishment stuck-in-the-mud.

HW: What are the most profound and dangerous misunderstandings of the early medieval past and its significance today that you encounter among the publics you encounter in person or online?

AP: Alongside that of idealised past identities as I discussed earlier, one aspect that immediately springs to mind is idea of homogeneity when it comes to early medieval cultures and the lack of nuance and the lack

of engagement with anything other than ethnic and linguistic homogeneity as if the defeated peoples are simply washed out to sea. This is a colonial view of the Vikings.

SS: As I said, it's the over-simplified ethnic/linguistic understandings of the period that are particularly problematic. For the period and region I'm considering, both English and Scottish nationalisms are a real problem. The Govan Stones project, as Adam mentioned above, seems to struggle to engage people from both these perspectives since the kingdom of Strathclyde is considered neither 'Scottish' nor 'English' – neither one nor the other and therefore conceptualisation and a sense ownership is restricted. There are quite a few of the old-fashioned ideas of migration theory – both in the public and the re-enactment communities – which are still the focus of interest and are difficult to challenge. The early medieval period is a bit like the One Ring in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which is valued but corrupts and draws people in. They try to wield it to validate it for their own life choices, and extreme groups do this in very unsavoury ways and this is a real challenge for us to tackle. I find I start most of my sentences when talking to the public with 'it's a little bit more complicated than that...'

HW: So the same problem applies among re-enactors themselves to a degree?

AP: Yes, to an extent, in that they sometimes don't have a nuanced sense of past societies and how they changed and interacted and to be brutally honest a lot of that comes from an uncritical reading of primary historical sources which they rely on. For example, the Battle of Brunanburh is the chief battle this weekend and it is portrayed as a straightforward battle between ethno-national groups. When we look at armies they are rarely composed in such strict ethnic and linguistic terms, and yet re-enactors create this fictional homogeneity and project it as authentic for the public to consume.

Runes are another problematic topic. Runes get massively misunderstood by re-enactors and the public alike. I'm not qualified to speak about whether that is 'dangerous' or not, but you see it widely in terms of the presumed innate magical qualities of runes and runic inscriptions, frequently linked to neo-Pagan belief systems: it is rarely portrayed just as a versatile and changing medium of written communication. I think this approach stems from ideas about the past and very much caught up in trying to find a way forward and create new belief systems. There are lots of neo-Heathens involved in re-enactment, many of whom are my friends and lovely people, many very left-leaning politically, and none I know of associated with the alt-right as some have asserted in academic circles. I don't share their world view but they are a very misunderstood segment of society. In many instances they are still appropriating the past, but then as I said above, so are many people.

HW: What about ethnic minority representation among re-enactment groups?

AP: All the groups I know of will allow people of any background to join. We often encourage people of different ethnic origins to create a period persona as it is a great opportunity to talk about the wider world in the early medieval period, but ultimately it is their choice. In the small groups I have run in the past we had a lady join who was from Portugal and was keen to have a narrative as a character related to Portugal in the Early Middle Ages. We created a story that worked for her but was definitely early medieval and not a back-projection of modern identities, which was fun because we learned about the Caliphate on the Iberian peninsula. Because we are a small group, we haven't faced transgender issues, but if we do, we would have a supportive conversation with the person about what they want to do, but safe to say we'd happily include anybody in the future. I have found that to be the case generally in early medieval re-enactment, it is a very tolerant and diverse interest group in the UK, but perhaps I have just been lucky?

HW: Isn't re-enactment ableist and does it ignore disability?

AP: We have had people of varying disabilities in the groups we have been in, including a lady who is a wheel chair user and deploys crutches for short distances too. The wheelchair is hidden when they are in character since those items, not the disability, would be anachronistic. Different groups vary.

Our group allows individuals in our group to use any device they need to function comfortably. What we try to do, if at all possible, is to hide or disguise the item so it doesn't stand out. So we don't hide their disability, unless they would rather do so, only the modern aids. So the wheelchair is hidden in the example I gave before, but the disability is part of her character and story, so long as they are comfortable with discussing that. We just hide the modern items.

HW: Another example is we have an anthropocentric environment here without animals.

AP: True, and it's a good point, and I'd add not just animals, but the landscape too; cultivated fields, managed woodlands, and other core aspects of early medieval life. Generally animals are expensive and require a lot of extra effort and admin to bring to an event. However, at some events such as at Moor Forge we have sheep and goats around us and we are working with the fleeces from those animals, and the same goes for events we have done in the past at Murton Park Museum of Farming. So if there is an opportunity to talk about the sea, land, animals and environment, we will use it!

HW: Are academics and professionals, and students, getting it wrong too?

AP: I think we all do to be honest. There are lots of nuanced understandings of grave-goods, language and runes, material cultures, and gross simplifications on daily life and other aspects of craft activities that often get badly simplified. Academics are usually specialists in some regards, but you cannot be experts in all areas of early medieval studies. Academics can readily make mistakes outside their specialism.

HW: So you would say that even though there are specialists in metalwork and other craft practices, academics still don't understand the quotidian and the chain of operations?

AP: Absolutely, it is why experimental archaeology is growing so fast, as there is so much that is published based on untested assumptions in this field. Sometimes in re-enactment you have a unique perspective as you are trying to create the 'whole'. Specialists naturally focus on the items and evidence they have, and their fields of expertise, and they are not always so engaged with the interfaces or the gaps. As a re-enactor, we have to engage with the gaps and reconstruct the whole, be it costume, craft kit or artefacts. So I cannot be strict about the exact evidence for clothing because I would be partly clad. Some things we have good evidence for, and other we have a single sample from a wide geographical area and time span, with perhaps only words and some stylised depictions to go off, yet still we have to engage with that and make an attempt at reconstructing to fill this gap, which can often be enlightening. We have a poor understanding of cut, shapes and patterns, colours, layers and differences between regions and social status and other aspects of social identity, so much is speculated, or models made from tiny datasets. For example, archaeologically we have no tunics between the 4th century and 11th century in Norway. Early medieval furniture is another massive gap in our knowledge; we have so little to go on, and what we do have, such as the finds from the Oseberg ship burial, it is regularly considered aberrant given the high-status funerary context.

HW: So re-enactors are better informed for dealing with the gaps in our evidence and the speculation required to reconstruct past material worlds than some archaeologists?

AP: They can be. For example, I frequently hear academics talk about pouches, and many people assume people kept things in pouches, but we have hardly any evidence of leather pouches at all in the Western Viking world. Likewise, we only have two wooden A-framed tents from Oseberg and one from Gokstad and yet we are using them everywhere as re-enactors, and many exhibitions and academics in talks refer to them as if they are ubiquitous too. I can see them perhaps being kept on boats for activity in proximity to water, but can you imagine travelling anywhere by horseback with these heavy structures? It's really unlikely. Anglo-Saxon manuscripts usually show a frameless wooden tent in bright colours, so these are sometimes used by some groups, including ours, but we don't know how big they are, or how they were made, and there is a great debate about whether they really were coloured or whether this

is just artistic license. There is a detailed conversation to be had here about who would use tents, when, and what they ought to look like.

Another example is craft working and tools (Figure 14). Many fine punches, gravers, and other tools are required to conduct a lot of the work found in finished objects, but little is known about them and most have never been found. Techniques are often poorly described too; many things cold formed and hammered from sheet metal or rods are described generally as ‘cast’, and ring-and-dot decoration is often called ‘punched’ in finds reports when, under microscope, they are clearly made by a two-point incising tool like a compass (something else we have never found). So the experimental archaeology and talking to contemporary craftspeople shows a clear set of misunderstandings in the academic literature. Some of these can have wider implications of trade and exchange, landscape management, and industrial manufacture and supply, so they are not just meaningless minutia.



Figure 14: Fine tools like this graver rarely survive archaeologically (Photograph: Adam Parsons)

HW: So there are as many misunderstandings in the academic community as in the re-enactment community?

AP: There can be misunderstandings, and sometimes simply no answer. Often I have gone to academic colleagues or specialists hoping for an answer, to find there isn't one, or they hadn't considered the question before. For example; we have big gaps regarding what people from the Welsh kingdoms looked like, which makes it really difficult to include and represent such people accurately at an event, despite them often being major players in historical events. This often leads to using later or even modern notions of what these people wore to try and make them visibly different, which may be very far from the truth. The frustration is we can't tell if this is reinforcing the issues with exaggerated ethnicities mentioned above or not, because we just don't know, but yet we still have to represent them. We even struggle with things as simple as how late Anglo-Saxon, Pictish, or Irish shields were made and what they looked like? Furnished inhumations and some waterlogged finds in Scandinavia have given us a good idea of how Viking shields may have been made, and furnished inhumations in the British Isles seem



Figure 15: Creative 'mock funerals' at the 2018 (above) and 2019 (below) Heysham Viking Festivals
(Photographs: Howard Williams)

to relate to immigrants from Scandinavia, but there are no such equivalent Irish, Pictish, Dal Riata, or Anglo-Saxon burials in this late period. We have a few stray shield bosses, with some very unusual shapes, and some very basic depictions showing potentially domed, curved, and square shield bosses, but how do we reconstruct these? This is frequently glossed over in literature, even ones pertaining to warfare, but it isn't something we can do when reconstructing objects, and these things can have a fundamental impact on how combat is conducted.

HW: Should we always counter/correct the public in their misunderstandings or ignorance on a subject and what are the best ways to do this without alienating people?

AP: I always see it as a springboard for positive redirection. I like to talk about where the perspective has come from and how the situation might be more complex. The fundamental problem with denouncing popular misunderstandings, myth-busting, is that you do not add anything to the conversation. It's like taking your car to the garage and saying 'I think it's the alternator' and coming back 3 hours later and the mechanic simply saying 'it's not the alternator, it's probably something to do with the crankshaft and you weren't right in proposing the alternator was at fault'. You're none the wiser, and they haven't fixed the problem. People often have half an idea and some enthusiasm about the topic, and myth-busting can often crush this, perhaps even make people a bit frustrated or embarrassed, either way an opportunity has been missed to gently correct a course and inspire further research. Even if we as educators don't have an answer, shifting the question, or explaining the complexities of the question, is a legitimate and important response, and often something that really enthuses people. If you understand the approach to a question, you'll understand why it cannot be answered, but it also makes you want to learn more around it. As with the mock furnished graves we were composing with members of the public here at the Heysham Viking Festival to explore the interpretive challenges of investigating Viking-period furnished inhumation graves (Figure 15), we weren't trying to give them emphatic answers. Instead, we were creatively composing a 'grave' and describing what we found in burials, and what form of evidence this took. We then discussed how they might put objects in graves, and if we could we know the meanings and motives behind their deposition. The short answer is that 'we can't know why', but we can approach the question in a qualified manner, and talk about some potential answers at this point, without feeling like we have to give 'the' answer, because the visitors now understand the problem too. We are in a climate of expert-busting, so if we can say we don't know the answer but we can refine our questions and posit some hypotheses, that is an honest and viable way forward, rather than posing simple and ultimately problematic answers.

SS: I try not to argue, but some of my group have disagreed with local characters promoting confused/pseudo-history. Occasionally, we have to face nationalist diatribes from the public, or completely simple misunderstandings, but most people are receptive and inquisitive. If they want to lecture me, which is rare, I simply say something polite like 'Oh I didn't know that'. But I do get really angry with some re-enactors who bluff about information and try to make stuff up. If you don't know, say so. If you learn something: discuss it and debate it, don't misrepresent yourself when you are in a position of responsibility by being a re-enactor. So re-enactment is a responsibility and we must be honest, but there are characters who won't listen and aren't interested in what we might actually know about the past. But you can't win every battle and it depends on the personality; some people won't be told, whereas most are keen to learn.

The Heysham Festival

HW: In terms of public engagement, I see a strength of the Heysham Viking Festival being its ability to combine a host of different activities including those with academic content, including stalls, our mock

Viking funerals, guided walks, and the public evening lectures.¹⁸ Tell me about your specific involvement and thoughts about the Heysham Viking Festival.

AP: The festival is organised by Heysham Neighbourhood Council; largely Peter Whaley, a local publican and builder. He engages Terry Harvey-Chadwick, a re-enactor, to run the majority of the living history encampment and the combat displays, and myself to organise academic lectures, a small corner of the living history camp, and last year a history and archaeology drop in centre. The event is run over two days, with a fun fair, food and gift stalls, a parade, a living history camp, re-enactment battles, and lectures.

Compared to other events, it is very community led and relies on the help of a lot of community volunteers. It is quite large for the modest venue size. It also grew very fast, given it is completely free to attend, and entirely self-funded.

I personally would prefer to see better traders and information at such events, but ultimately, this isn't my event, and it is run for entertainment. I am pleased that the organisers have been so receptive to me wanting to add some academic and educational aspects, and I hope we can build on that in future.

The Future

HW: What do you envision is changing about your public engagements and what new strategies can you deploy for public engagement?

AP: A lot will be slow growth and continuity. We have ambitions in our group to blend the interface between re-enactment and academia a bit more including the venues we go to, the people we speak with, and what we do. We very much enjoy working with academics such as yourself at public events, and other Universities too, to get a better understanding ourselves on some of the superb research that is ongoing, which fuels our work with new ideas and understanding, and then we can help to bring that to a broader public audience. In digital terms, we under-utilise this but then it is a hobby and we don't necessarily have the remit or time to do everything. However, we do want to have a section on our website with specific topics, and tackle these with mixed media; videos, pictures, text, sound clips, etc. We are hoping to do some with Amy focusing on textile production and address through this media, exactly how she has reconstructed and researched some of the issues she has come across and observations she has made when reconstructing textiles from the period. We hope to do that with a range of subjects, perhaps some videos with academics, experts, and other re-enactors, or text, videos and creating a small, specific resource centre for those subjects.

SS: I can see closer engagements between academia and lots of different periods of re-enactment as being important. I can see YouTube being a key avenue for this, but there are other media that have potential too. I think that Dr Chloë Duckworth's *Archaeoduck* channel is a great initiative, for example (Duckworth 2017–, 2019). Put her radiocarbon dating in front of a group of primary school kids and they will know better than many adults how we date artefacts. *Archaeosoup* is also accessible but more cerebral and comprehensive and are not catered towards kids. However, more collaborations between re-enactors and academics can make valuable resources for the public, including school kids and there is enthusiasm from both sides to do this. Already, however, there are tangible benefits to public engagement in the Early Middle Ages by both academics and re-enactors, influencing and inspiring the way we move forward.

¹⁸ <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/07/16/what-we-dont-know-about-the-heysham-hogback/>; <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2018/07/24/heysham-viking-festival-2018-reflections/>; <https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2019/08/08/heysham-viking-festival-2019-reflections/>

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Part 3

Dark Age Media

Archaeology in *Alfred the Great* (1969) and *The Last Kingdom* (2015-)

Victoria Nicholls and Howard Williams

Alfred the Great (1969) was the first, and remains the only, feature-length film portraying the West Saxon king and his conflicts with the Danes. Forty-seven years later, Bernard Cornwell's novels have been adapted for television as *The Last Kingdom* (2015-). Despite being fictional adaptations of historical events, and despite the considerable separation in time between their production, both *Alfred the Great* and *The Last Kingdom* consciously aspired to portray the Saxons and Vikings with a high degree of historical accuracy. Taking an archaeological perspective – focusing on the material cultures represented and their archaeological inspirations – this chapter asks which is more effective in representing late 9th-century Britain and what are the implications of this comparison?

Introduction

The portrayal of the Viking world in films and television dramas has received modest attention, and with relatively little consideration regarding the character and accuracy of the material cultures deployed (e.g. Hall 2009; Harty 2011; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007). Only recently, and primarily in relation to the History Channel's *Vikings*, have the artefacts, materials, built environments and landscapes of these modern media of entertainment started to be evaluated, and only in the context of death rituals (see Williams 2019a). This chapter aims to broaden this field of enquiry and adopts a comparative approach. Both the 1969 film *Alfred the Great* (AtG), and the ongoing BBC television series *The Last Kingdom* (TLK) (2015-present), represent late ninth-century Wessex, the Danelaw and Northumbria on screen (plus forays elsewhere), depicting both the Anglo-Saxons and Danes (Northmen) in the context of Alfred the Great's reign. Each of these productions claimed at the time of their release to have represented the 9th century as accurately as possible, and for TLK this is taken to extreme lengths of hyperbole by the production team and actors in an online video: *The Last Kingdom: Creating the World* (SomeHistoryStuff 2016). This chapter will evaluate these claims from an archaeological perspective by comparing and contrasting the representation of three prevalent forms of material culture in each production: brooches, swords and ships.

Brooches

Both productions deploy brooches replicating and/or inspired by early medieval archaeological finds. Throughout AtG, Alfred and other lead Anglo-Saxon characters wear numerous brooches, but the choices are incongruous in archaeological terms. In one scene, King Alfred wears a pair of square-headed brooches known mainly from early 6th-century furnished inhumation graves as a high-status element of female-gendered dress accessories (Hines 1997). Alfred wears them as a pair on the shoulders fastening his cloak to his tunic rather than singly as found in female-gendered burial assemblages of over three centuries earlier! The disc brooch Alfred wears in another scene also has 6th-century parallels. Finally, a third brooch worn by Alfred matches closely to an 8th-century example of a penannular brooch. Alfred's West Saxon costume is therefore differentiated from the Danes by selecting pre-Viking Insular items, but including items that would challenge early medieval conventions of gendered costume. By way of contrast, the Danish leader Guthrum is depicted wearing a pair of Irish penannular brooches that would not be implausible in the context of the 8th or 9th centuries in the context of elite male costume, but again they would not be worn as a pair (Ó Flíonn 1989; e.g. Ashby and Leonard 2018: 132–133). The gender confusion is more striking in another scene where Guthrum wears a pair of tortoise brooches: a contemporaneous and Scandinavian style of dress, and in these regards broadly accurate, but again

these are items inferred to be exclusively female-gendered in the Viking world (e.g. Hinton 2005: 117–118; Paterson *et al.* 2014: 53–67)! So both the ruler of the West Saxons and the Danes deploy female brooches, operating centuries out of their archaeological data-range in the case of Alfred but more contemporaneous for Guthrum.

TLK struggles with the same gender and ethnic incongruities. The brooches shown worn by lead characters in *TLK* Season 1 are centuries out of their proper context. In one striking case the brooch is too young and likely have crossed over gender lines: the Urnes-style brooch worn by Odda the Elder in Season 1 is at least two centuries too early (Graham-Campbell 2013: 133–135). Conversely, Odda the Younger wears a small square-headed brooch like those found in female-gendered burial assemblages in the early 6th century AD from east Kent and Merovingian Gaul (e.g. brooch DVB 407 from Buckland, Dover) (Soulat 2016: 21). While Viking-period in date, again on gender and ethnic grounds it is strikingly odd to see the West Saxon King Aethelberht wearing a trefoil brooch of Scandinavian style whilst in his court in Winchester (Pestell 2015: 234–238; Williams 2018a).

AtG and *TLK* therefore have a lot in common despite four-and-a-half decades separating their production. Both deploy early medieval brooches but with stark incongruities in terms of chronology, gender and ethnicity. A distinction can be made between the two productions, however, when we come to consider the dress accessories deployed in *TLK* Season 2. Here, the West Saxon ruler wears an exact replica of the 9th-century silver Fuller Brooch (Hinton 2005: 110–112; Williams 2018a; Wilson 1964: 211–214), and thus a distinctive choice of a brooch of the right date, provenance and high-status associations. Likewise, at another point in Season 2, Alfred wields the famous Alfred Jewel, although represented unfortunately in its modern-day broken state (Ashby and Leonard 2018: 40; Hinton 2005: 129–131; Webster 2012: 152, 154; Williams 2019c)! It seems that attempts are being made in Season 2 to escape the anachronisms of Season 1, even if the artefacts can appear as broken items.

In summary, both productions draw on the archaeological record and seem intent on adorning lead male Anglo-Saxon and Danish characters with female dress accessories from centuries earlier or later. Yet for *TLK*, there is a concerted effort, specifically in Season 2, to represent actual famous archaeological finds into the storyline as worn and used by key historical personages of the late 9th century. Having said that, the burgeoning evidence for later Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian dress accessories from excavations and metal-detector finds over the last half-century does not seem to have left an impression on the material world of *TLK* (e.g. Kershaw 2013).

Swords

While there are many critical comments one could make of both productions regarding weapons and armour, this brief discussion will focus on swords: the highest status and most prized martial implement of 9th-century Britain. Here, the tables are turned. The significant sword used in several scenes throughout the film *AtG* possesses many similarities to archaeological discoveries of 9th-century weapons, notably the hilt which closely parallels the Abingdon Sword which is of a quality to plausibly be a weapon wielded by West Saxon royalty or ealdormen (Hinton 2005: 110–111, 131; Wilson 1964, plate VI; Webster 2012: 156–157) and it bears an inscribed Frankish blade (Davidson 1962: 42–50). Many other swords are generally accurate in general terms, but no detailed evaluation can be made: after all, around 1,600 swords were made for *AtG* (Galway Advertiser 2018).

In contrast, *TLK* departs from any archaeological groundings in its most widely represented blade: the sword carried by Uthred throughout bears few similarities to any known Viking-period weapons and is implausibly worn in a back-scabbard. While the blade and guard crudely match with the archaeological examples (Graham-Campbell 2013: 30), the grip and pommel are fanciful. More specifically, there are

no swords that match the amber fixed to the top of the pommel, which looks plain bizarre in an early medieval context (see Williams 2018a). So if *TLK*, despite many mistakes, can be shown to have a slight advantage over *AtG* in regards to brooches, it fails to impress in its representation of swords and *AtG* wins hands down.

Ships

A higher degree of equivalent accuracy can be identified for each production when it comes to the replica seagoing vessels deployed. Thanks to the discoveries of the Gokstad and Oseberg ships and their display in *Vikingskipshuset*, Oslo, filmic and televisual representations of Viking longships have a long history of authentic replication. Specifically, both *AtG* and *TLK* inherit this tradition of claiming verisimilitude through archaeological finds from *The Vikings* (1958) which includes the lead character Einar (Kirk Douglas) performing his own stunts running along the oars against the backdrop of a Norwegian fjord (Kelly 2011: 12; Tveskov and Erlandson 2007: 42). Those in *AtG* were clearly inspired by the Gokstad Ship (Ashby and Leonard 2018: 70–71; Snyder 2011: 42) even if the figureheads on the stern of the longboats are overly pronounced and without a precise parallel in the archaeological record. In contrast, the longships in *TLK* display a more accurate depiction of a figurehead, being smaller and thus less prominent and drawing on more informed seaworthy replica vessels, including the Sea Stallion of Glendalough which was built to replicate the Skuldelev 2 wreck (Crumlin-Pedersen 2010: 20–40). Unfortunately, there is again greater anachronism in the portrayal of the longships in *TLK* than *AtG*, because the slender, long warships shown in Seasons 1, 2 and 3 of *TLK* illustrate a phenomenon of the late Viking Age, not the 9th century (Crumlin-Pederson 2010: 99). In this regard, *TLK* is a victim of its over-enthusiasm by representing seagoing vessels designed specifically for war that are two centuries in advance of 9th-century craft. On balance, once again, *AtG* stands the test of time better in its representation of Viking longships of the 9th century than *TLK*.

Discussion

Film and television has become a medium in communicating and educating mass audiences and introducing them to historical and archaeological themes via entertainment (Hall 2009). Yet while between 1969 and 2015, public exposure to the material cultures, architectures and landscapes of the Early Middle Ages has been enhanced considerably, from *Time Team* to the availability of information via the World Wide Web (Bonacchi 2013: 119; Henson 2005), representations of archaeological periods can remain ‘cringe-worthy’ in this popular medium (Moshenska 2017: 152). Often experts are not consulted on details of material culture, monuments and landscapes in productions that then claim to be recreating versions of the Early Middle Ages. Indeed, Henson (2005) states explicitly that the representation portrayed on film and television is not indicative of the views of professional archaeologists/historians, but rather the view of the producers. As Tveskov and Erlandson (2007: 45) argue, academic research is integral to these popular representations of the Vikings and exist in recursive relationship with them. Yet, it is clear that productions often afford Victorian and Edwardian archetypes precedence over details of archaeological research. In this instance, the vast increase in knowledge of Anglo-Scandinavian material culture from excavations and metal-detector finds over the last half century has demonstrably *not* made a significant impression on the portrayal of the later 9th century in England. While the way production companies operate is part of the picture, archaeologists and historians must be considered at least partly responsible for not telling their archaeological narratives in a compelling fashion and making their knowledge readily accessible via digital arena (Tveskov and Erlandson 2007: 47).

This situation is starkly illustrated by the comparisons made in this short chapter. The late 9th-century depictions of both *AtG* (1969) and *TLK* (2015–), despite being separated by over 40 years, display similar

strengths, including their informed portrayal of ships, as they share an inheritance of early well-preserved archaeological finds, and a persistent fascination in, and replication of, Viking longships in televisual and filmic productions. This is because the accurate portrayal of Norse seafaring is a successful inheritance of late 19th- and early 20th-century archaeological discoveries. Conversely, it is worth mentioning that neither deploy the 19th-century fantastical winged or horned helmets: both productions clearly aspire to represent an historical era rather than a time of fantasy and legend.

In other regards, however, there is little evidence of progression between *AtG* and *TLK*, with flagrant inaccuracies and anachronisms abounding in the latter as much as the former. Despite generations of new archaeological research it is quite disheartening to find that *TLK*'s claims to create an immersive early medieval world are largely rhetorical and the show is working from a pre-1950s baseline of archaeological knowledge. Indeed, in many regards, from the portrayal of agricultural life to the helmets worn by the Anglo-Saxons and Danes, *AtG* is unquestionably a superior production in terms of accuracy than *TLK* considering the knowledge available at the time of production (Williams 2019). Likewise, as discussed above, some of the prominent swords are far less obviously fantastical in *AtG* and inspired by 9th-century high-status West Saxon metalwork. Hence, in some important ways, *TLK* is a regression, with far more limited research and respect for archaeological information by costume designs and set designers than in *AtG*.

Where *TLK* has the edge in artefactual terms is in a desire, evident in the uses of brooches (but also in saint's relics and martial gear), to implant specific archaeological objects into the storyline, from the Fuller brooch (Williams 2018b), Alfred Jewel (Williams 2018c) and the coffin of St Cuthbert (Williams 2018d) to the Pioneer Helmet (Williams 2019a) and the Bewcastle monument (Williams 2019b), even if the items are often represented with glaring errors in their form and function. This is also matched with considerable cross-fertilisation with the rival television show *Vikings* (2013–) in the preference for tattoos and elaborate eyeliner as a signature of Scandinavian male appearance. Indeed, it is perhaps to *Vikings* that we must turn to see a much closer synergy between recent academic research and popular fictional portrayals of the early Viking Age (Williams 2019c, Williams and Klevnäs 2019; Williams 2020). Certainly, it will be interesting to see if archaeological research is taken any more seriously in another 46 years time! However, in its deployment of artefacts inspired by archaeological finds, despite being a box-office flop, the 1969 *Alfred the Great* prevails in comparison with the popular recent television show *The Last Kingdom* in how it deploys dress accessories, swords and ships in its representation of the 9th century AD.

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‘It’s the End of the World as we Know it ...’: Reforging Ragnarök through Popular Culture

Mark A. Hall

This contribution assesses the conceptualisation of the Ragnarök myth within the present day popular culture creation of the Marvel Universe, primarily as depicted in the on-going cycle of films and in the context of the earlier iteration of that Universe in Marvel Comics. It does so alongside a range of contemporary popular culture manifestations around Ragnarök and the Norse myth cycle, setting the assessment in a wider context of the nature of the Ragnarök myth and its depiction of a varying conceptualisation of doom and rebirth and made manifest in a changing material culture output from the Viking Age to today.

Introduction

The quote that commences the title of this paper is borrowed from the eponymous 1987 song by American rock band R.E.M., chosen for its redolence to the theme of impending apocalypse, something that has been emphasised in cultural reuses of the song. In 2011 satirical videos appeared on YouTube skitting the end of the world predictions of radio preacher Harold Camping. In 2012 record sales of the track soared in advance of the supposed Mayan Apocalypse calculated for December 21. In the original music video for the song the setting is an abandoned, derelict, post-apocalyptic farmhouse littered with human possessions. Rummaging through this stuff a young skateboarder begins to do skateboard tricks, a play parallel for the golden pieces episode from the Norse myths discussed below. Finally, and perhaps most famously, the track is used to comment on the aliens-arrival at the start of the science-fiction alien invasion movie *Independence Day*. Whilst these may not be explicit references to Ragnarök, there can be said to be an implied citation, or a set of affordances if you will, drawing on Ragnarök as an element of a discursive cross-cultural take on the fluid notion of apocalypse. In this short contribution the aim is to examine not the whole cycle of the Norse myths and their continuous reinvention but their key defining aspect, the destructive fatalism of Ragnarök - in what feels like a time of ever deepening political meltdown, it seems apposite to explore the biographical trajectory of belief as seen through the lens of some recent and not so recent reimaginings of the Norse myth of Ragnarök. The focus is on recent iterations in Marvel comics and films and these are set in context alongside contemporary reiterations (notably Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* and Joanne Harris’s *Loki* books) and the nineteenth century Romantic revival of the Norse myths.

The paper also forms part of an on-going exploration by the author of the role of cinema in representing and reimagining the medieval past (e.g. see Hall 2006, 2009, 2011). In this study the cinematic lens is contextualised further with other popular culture media (music, literature, comics and digital gaming) that also refashion Ragnarök in successive time periods for successive generations. The paper thus encompasses a wide range of material culture manifestations cross-cutting with ideas about materiality, performance, authenticity, biography, memory and meaning-making. It will be the task of another paper to explore the archaeological infrastructure of the Marvel Universe in particular - encompassing the collections of objects (e.g. the Asgard treasury, e.g. the Collector’s museum), the digital technology of site interpretation (e.g. Peter Quill’s virtual headset that visually resurrects buildings and their occupants) or the range of ruins and monuments that create a lived-in past (e.g. the entirely imaginary city built in the ruins of a celestial being’s head, that is Knowhere - briefly discussed below - or the use of Durham Cathedral to evoke the interior spaces of the palace of Asgard); all elements that combine to evoke a sense of loss, a sense of memory and a sense of commemoration to be dealt with in that future paper.

Setting the scene: literary and sculptural reimaginings from the Viking Age to Snorri Sturluson to Joanne Harris

Space precludes here an assessment of the whole medieval reconceptualising of the Norse myths (but see for example Andrén *et al.* 2006; Ross 1994, 1998) and I will focus the medieval and later retellings of Ragnarök specifically. The origins of Ragnarök – the cataclysmic destruction of the Asgardian world and its gods – are impossible to recover beyond saying they were probably heterodox and rooted in Late Iron Age religious practices, varying in time, place and social setting and it may not even have been a staple element of these beliefs (Andrén *et al.* 2006). Certainly in its history the idea of Ragnarök reveals itself to have a changing conceptualisation, though it does seem likely that it always carried an intent around the renewal of an existing order consequent on a cycle of birth, decay, death and rebirth. Perhaps the first clear instance of its transitional status is its infusing with Christian theology by Icelandic scholar and poet, Snorri Sturluson, when he reformulates the *Völuspá* account – perhaps already carrying some Christian overtones in some of the variations of the tale that Snorri drew on (Larrington 2014) – with his prose version, *Gylfaginning* (Faulkes 2008). In the former, Ragnarök is the culmination of a natural cycle of ageing, out of which all is reborn. For the classicising and Christianising Snorri it becomes the culmination of corruption unleashed upon a Golden Age (for the complex interaction between Norse paganism and Christianity see for example, Staecker 1999, Jesch 2004 and Lincoln 2006). The two versions, of course, still turn on a renewal out of destruction, albeit one is more seasonally cyclical and the other more about corruption. And, of course, Christianity is itself predicated on a destruction of corruption (death and sin) through the sacrifice of the Son of God, Christ.

According to Teichert's interpretation (2014: 309-10) both *Völuspá* (implicitly) and *Gylfaginning* (explicitly) share the motif of the theft of golden playing pieces and their rediscovery once the world is recreated anew. In *Völuspá* this is understandable as a seed of decay – foreshadowing the clash of the gods with the giantesses – whilst in *Gylfaginning* it is symbolic of the idea of a Golden Age of happiness (Hall 2016; Teichert 2014: 310). Stanza 8 and stanza 58 of *Völuspá* tell us that at the dawn of creation the gods play with golden playing pieces on a splendid plain, until three giantesses attack. Ragnarök arrives and afterwards the *Æsir*, on a new plain, on a newly created Earth, discuss the past and speculate that golden playing pieces will be found in the grass. The conventional interpretation (discussed for example in Dronke 1997; Teichert 2014; van Hamel 1934) holds that the playing of board games was an expression of merriness and idleness in a youthful paradise that amounted to a Golden Age, one shattered by the giantesses, with fate then following its course until Ragnarök destroys all. A second Golden Age is ushered in by a newly created paradise symbolized by the rediscovery of the golden gaming pieces. However, as Teichert (2014, following the scepticism expressed by van Hamel 1934) has shown, this picture does not match what *Völuspá* tells us; indeed we are not dealing with a paradise but a world full of violence and conflicts, introduced by the attacking giantesses and the gnawing world serpent at the foot of Yggdrasil. The notion of a Golden Age is an interpretation introduced by the Christian and Classicizing writer Snorri Sturluson in his *Gylfaginning* (Pétursson 2006; Sigurður Nordal 1973). Seduced by the easy link between a Golden Age and the golden gaming pieces he essentially inverts the meaning of the board-gaming motif; in *Völuspá* it can be read as a foreshadowing motif of violence and conflict. Both mentions prefigure conflict, first with the giantesses and then with the reappearance of the serpent in the new world. Just as golden treasure is deceitful and not to be trusted so play and merriness cannot last. This is consistent with the poem's sense of decay and destruction, embedded in the moment of creation of the universe. It is Snorri's version that retains a great deal of popular appeal and fuels more recent re-imaginings. Thus, the recovery of that Golden Age is hinted at in Joanne Harris's novel (2014) *The Gospel of Loki*, in which its concluding 'Prophecy of the Oracle' [the oracle being the head of Ymir] includes the lines:

On what was once the battlefield

A New Age dawns. Its children

Find the golden gaming-boards

Of bright Asgard, the fallen.

The Gospel of Loki is Harris' re-telling of Ragnarök from the perspective of the redeemable Loki. It is a prequel to her two Runemarks novels, *Runemarks* (2007) and *Runelight* (2011). These earlier novels are set in a post-Ragnarök parallel world where the Norse gods are wandering outlaw figures persecuted by a new religious authority, the Order. Harris's versions of both Asgard and a post-Ragnarök parallel world share the underlying and inevitable destiny of Ragnarök, followed by renewal/change, followed by Ragnarök and so on ad infinitum.

Snorri was not, however, the first to Christianise the Norse myths and specifically those of Ragnarök. The case of amuletic Thor's hammers will be dealt with below and here I wish to focus on Viking Age sculpture from Northern England. A range of imagery has been identified as relatable to the Ragnarök cycle, notably at Gosforth, Cumbria (Bailey 1980: 124-31; Bailey and Cramp 1988: 100-104; Bailey 1996: 85-90), Skipwith, Yorkshire (Bailey 1980: pl. 35, 134; Lang 1991: 214-215) and Ovingham, Northumberland (Bailey 1980: 133-134; Cramp 1984: ill. 1199; Dronke 1996: VI, 71), which are drawn together by Bailey (2000: 17-22). He adduces that there was no established iconography for Ragnarök but that the theme had a wide appeal over the whole of Northumbria but only selects a few elements from the Ragnarök cycle. The debate has also ranged over other examples sometimes accepted, sometimes rejected as depicting Ragnarök: several scenes of snake-wrestling (again including Gosforth, and also Great Clifton) once seen as Ragnarök encounters are now seen as Christian Hell scenes (Bailey 2000: 17). Bailey prefers the pre-Viking examples of sculpture and text (the Bible) to explain these themes but it seems hard to entirely rule out the possible workings of syncretism or at least affordances as being at work.

The Gosforth Cross, dating to the first half of the tenth century, is perhaps the key stone monument depicting elements of Ragnarök. Recognisable are a possible Tyr on horseback beneath a wolf-creature that has broken free from its bounds, the bound Loki with his faithful wife Sigyn, Heimdallr with his horn and Vitharr rending Fenrir's jaws. Vitharr kills Fenrir, with his foot in his mouth, during the final stages of Ragnarök, and survives as one of the re-founding new gods. There are archaeological hints that this episode had a wider currency in material culture. From excavations at Kaupang comes a small amulet in the shape of a foot, made of amber (Resi 2011: 115-116, fig. 6.7). It has a series of amber and bone/antler parallels from other Scandinavian towns including Hedeby, Birka, Wolin and Paviken, which following Solli (2002: 34-35, fig. 5) could be seen as a reference to Ragnarök and symbolising mastery of (and so protection from) it. Resi (2011: 116) also explores a potential link with pagan, classical-originating, ex-voto practices (which we should also recognise continued in a Christian milieu).

To return to Gosforth, its Cross also depicts clearly Christian scenes (and, of course, places all its images on the framing device of a cross) including Christ crucified and accompanied by the figures of Longinus and Mary Magdalene. Above the crucifixion scene is that of Vitharr breaking the monster's jaws – Vitharr and Christ were both ultimately triumphant (Dronke 1996: II, 3), indeed the juxtaposition of Christ and Vitharr here also affords a reflection on Christ conquering Hell. His story is also mentioned in Snorri's *Prose Edda* but he is also to be found in the older Poetic Edda (including in *Völuspá* and *Lokasenna*) and maybe an example of an already Christianised Ragnarök element before Snorri gets to work. Bailey suggests that the combination of Christian and pagan motifs is one of provocative juxtapositions, within the context of conversion of a pagan world and 'suggestions of parallels and contrasts between the ends of various worlds. The cross sets before us the end of the world of the old gods, the end of the world of the Old Covenant and the end of the world which will come with the Christian Doomsday ... the latter end accompanied by many of the signs which marked both Ragnarök and Christ's death, and which the Christian liturgy constantly evoked in contemplation of the crucifixion.' (Bailey 2000: 21 and see Bailey 1980: 129-130, 163-164).

From Romanticism to superheroes 1): Artistic Ragnaröks of the nineteenth century

The nineteenth century Romantic Movement (beginning in the late eighteenth century) is pivotal in understanding the renewed popularity and reinvention of the Norse myths. It was in that century that the romantic cultivation of the sagas came into full bloom – they helped to inspire independence movements and did so along with a similar Romantic engagement with other works such as *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus (Kristjánsson 1992: 22). These in turn inspired a new outpouring of poetry, literature, painting and the sculptural arts (Ljøgodt 2012; Wilson and Rosedahl 1992; Wilson 1997). Notable painters include Arbo (e.g. *The Wild Hunt of Odin* (1868) and *The Valkyrie* (1869)) Winge (e.g. *Thor Battling the Giants* (1872)) and Baade (e.g. *Heimdall Summons the Gods to Battle* (1828) and *The Prophecy of Vala* (1843)). In terms of sculpture perhaps the most significant artist was the German-born Dane, Hermann Ernst Freund, the first Danish sculptor to portray the Norse myths. He created various statues of the Norse gods as inspired by classical sculptures of the Greek pantheon. His masterpiece was conceived in 1820s, *Ragnarökfrisen* – the retelling of Ragnarök in a frieze running around the interior of the Christiansborg Palace, Copenhagen. Freund began installation in 1827 but only completed one long side before his death in 1840. The remainder was completed by Herman Wilhelm Bissen in 1841–1842. In Freund's conceptualisation Ragnarök concludes with the Christian god arriving in glory, enthroned on a planet and drawn by griffins: a new beginning under one greater than Odin (Monrad 1986), which no doubt Snorri would have approved of.

The historical value of the original sources, notably the Sagas, was much more critically assessed from the late nineteenth century but this did not lessen the Romantic appeal. This also spread beyond the Scandinavian homelands – it was notably prevalent in Britain for example. Frank Dicksee's painting, *The Funeral of a Viking*, was presented to the world at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition, in 1893; the same year a replica of the Gokstad ship was sailed to Chicago for the Columbian Exposition world's fair (Marshall 2017: 9). This was within thirteen years of the actual Gokstad ship being excavated and put on display in its own museum in Oslo, becoming an international symbol of the Vikings. The replica (called the *Viking*) drew on this and sought to confirm it by sailing the North Atlantic to Chicago – despite Nicolaysen, the excavator's, strong objections on the grounds the ship was a coastal not an ocean vessel – playing a part in the political debates in America around Columbus as discoverer or Ericsson as discoverer and the consequent respect due to the relevant group of migrants (Peterson 2015). At the same time replicas of Columbus' ships sailed from Spain to New York and the crews of these and the Viking clashed on the streets of New York with police arrests following (Petersson 2015). All of this resonates with, indeed probably helped to establish, the popular culture tropes about the Vikings – that they were the greatest sailors, the hardest warriors and so on (Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 58 and following Service 1998; for the 19th-century reinventions see also Wawn 1994 and 2000). The authenticity of the replica boat, its evocation of the past (what Holtorf 2013 has characterised as an object's 'pastness') was initially high (and not inhibited by its being a replica (Foster 2018; Foster and Curtis 2016; Foster and Jones 2019a and b)) but a decade later it was in decay. A rescue campaign saw it put under cover in Chicago. Since 2007 a new campaign has been under way to fully restore the replica. Such episodes as the replica boat were part of a wider European phenomenon of re-imagining early medieval material culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Effros and Williams 2008).

German artists took up the calling both in Europe and America. Freidrich William Heine moved from Germany to Milwaukee, where he produced a famous series of paintings and etchings based on Norse mythology, including *Battle of the Doomed Gods*, in 1882. His contemporary (in Germany) Karl Ehrenberg in the same year contributed his etching *The Downfall of the Æsir*, to the book *Nordisch-germanische Götter und Helden* by Wilhelm Wågner. It is Ehrenberg's version of *Gylfaginning* ch. 51, in which the sons of Múspell descend on the Æsir and its imagery is redolent of the angelic army of heaven descending on Satan and his forces, emphasising the fusion with Christianity.

It was left to music to provide one of the most distinctive and long-lasting iterations of the Norse myths and specifically Ragnarök, namely *Götterdämmerung*, the German translation of the word and the title of

Richard Wagner's opera, first performed in 1876 – the concluding, fourth part of his Ring cycle: *Der Ring des Nibelungen/The Ring of the Nibelung* (Danuser 1994; Darcy 1994; Hall 1963); that first performance – in Bayreuth – also giving us the idea of the Viking horned helmet, courtesy of the opera's designers (Marshall 2017: 10). Wagner's conceptualisation has had a long and enduring impact not only through the frequent restagings of the opera but through incidental references to it which emphasise the doom of Ragnarök. In *The Battle of the River Plate* (1956), about the British navy pursuit of the German pocket battle ship the Graf Spee in the early months of World War II, resulting in its scuttling in the harbour of Montevideo, Uruguay. As the ship blows up the American news reporter broadcasting live from the harbour-side remarks on its burning that 'it is like a Viking funeral'. And on the balcony of the British Embassy, the British Ambassador remarks, 'Twilight of the Gods ...'. Wagner's operatic lens comes more explicitly in to play with the Vietnam war movie, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), a film which clearly uses Apocalypse as a cognate for Ragnarök. For a key battle scene the US helicopters blare out 'The Ride of the Valkyries' from *Götterdämmerung*, and in which the US military is the reiterated Sutr, bringing fiery death, in this case through napalm.

From Romanticism to superheroes 2): Coming to America

With the development of the movies through the twentieth century a new media is introduced through which the Norse myths are reiterated. The most notable direct adaptations are probably the German two-part films *Die Nibelungen* (1924 d. Fritz Lang) and *Die Nibelungen* (1966/67 d. H Reinl) but films also reference Ragnarök metaphorically. The musical referencing of Wagner in *Battle of the River Plate* and *Apocalypse Now* have been mentioned above. Other examples notably include the Star Wars cycle, a sequence of nine films punctuated by cyclical episodes of planetary destruction and re-incarnated Empires and Republics. The recurrence of this now cross-cultural trope, we might justifiably call it the Ragnarök meme, continues.

Most recently (at the time of writing) it has been made manifest in the sci-fi epic, *Alita: Battle Angel* (US/CAN/ARG/ 2019). Set in the 26th century – many, many Ragnaröks into the future – and some 300 years after an intergalactic conflict between (Earth-colonised) Mars and Earth. With the passing of those 300 years another Ragnarök approaches, hastened by the 'resurrection' of a Martian cyborg, one of its supreme fighting weapons, a berserker, who through her sobriquet of 'battle angel' also manages to invoke a Valkyrie identity (for the wider context of berserkr on screen see Dale 2014: 355–362). The concept of berserker deployed by this film is that of a warrior champion fighting a just cause, one closer in spirit to the later medieval Scandinavian concept of berserker as champion than to the frenzied warrior of the Viking Age (Dale 2014: 180–82; Price 2002, 363–88; Price 2014). Superficially this might look like a timeous conjunction with historical enquiry; the question of the existence of female warriors being hotly debated in print and social media at present, particularly around the interpretation of the female grave Bj.581 from Birka, Sweden (Price et al. 2019 and see also Price 2015: 4–7) but the timing is coincidental. The film has been in production for at least three years and it is an adaptation of a Japanese manga comic series, *Gunm*, by Yukito Kishiro and which ran from 1990–1995. In fact this is a further example of how popular culture often explores territory well in advance of historical or archaeological enquiry (the field of cultural or object biography is a further example of this, see for example Hall 2012). The imaginative adaptation has been particularly Revisionist in the context of gender-swapping. As early as the 1978 a female version of Thor appeared in Marvel Comics, when in issue 10 of the *What If* series ('What If Jane Foster Had Found the Hammer of Thor'), Thor's helper on Earth, Jane Foster, becomes briefly Thordis, a female Thor, saving Asgard from Ragnarök before surrendering her powers. A more fully conceived gender swap of the character, 'Thor: Goddess of Thunder' appeared in 2014–2015, in her own comic run (Thor volume 4), again averting Ragnarök with an act of self-sacrifice. Implicit in this swap is that female warriors are as acceptable in the Ragnarök conflict as male warriors and linking this to the Birka female warrior reinterpretation of chamber grave Bj581 (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Price et al. 2019), it is possible to argue that this follows an ancient viewpoint – that female warriors would be as welcome in Valhalla as male warriors. This is something which may have changed

with the Christianisation of the Norse myths. The thirteenth–fourteenth-century Saga tales of female warriors/maiden kings – including Hervör, captain of a Viking band, in *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra* – (Norrman 2000) emphasise that such women are acting outside their biological gender and that the stress this puts on the social order (perpetuating a sort of social Ragnarök) require those women to eventually return to their biological destiny of mother, wife and hearth-maker.

American Gods and Thor: Ragnarok

Against that backdrop, I wish to focus on two 2017 moving-image re-imaginings which contrast with the literary castings discussed above: the TV series *American Gods* (2017) and the movie *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017). Both deal, in different ways, with the eternal presence of the gods in the contemporary context of the here and now. *American Gods* is a cable TV adaptation of Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel with the same title. The second season of the TV adaptation has yet to air but the arc it follows is broadly that of the novel. The essential conceit of the story is that gods only exist because people believe in them and that in America there are as many gods as there are immigrant populations (some of which arrived during the Ice Age and some during Viking exploration) and including many different kinds of self-sacrificing Jesuses and a leprechaun known as Mad Sweeney, exemplary of the work's eclectic cultural borrowings, in this case, the Irish tale of king Suibhne mac Colmain, cursed with madness by St. Ronan (O'Keefe 1913; Heaney 1983). There is also a group of new gods led by the Capitalist Triumvirate of Media, Mr World and Technology Boy. These are increasingly draining the belief in the older gods and the story charts a course of impending Ragnarök, a conflagration engineered by Odin ('Mr Wednesday') and Loki as a means of increasing their powers. But Gaiman neatly side-steps that ending through the agency of a new character, Shadow Moon, a Christ-like human son of Odin, who averts the sacrifice of Ragnarök. Ironically, the aversion of Ragnarök proves to be a personal Ragnarök for Odin and Loki, whose American personifications are brought to an end. In a tale set in America and bringing together so many belief-systems and their deities, their believers and their non-believers, it is a clever trick to dispense with Ragnarök and maintain the myth of America the Undying, ceaselessly reinventing itself.

The vision of Ragnarök offered by *Thor: Ragnarok* is equally Revisionist. The roots of this vision lie in the Marvel Comics recreation of Thor as a contemporary superhero (part of the comic-book reiteration of the Norse myths that is an aspect of popular culture reception absent from the coverage of that theme in Andrén *et al.* 2006; for the wider context of Thor's trajectory in popular culture see for example, Arnold 2011 and McSweeney 2018: 72–81). This began in 1960–1970s America (and off-world) in the comics: the first Marvel version appeared in 1962, in *Journey into Mystery*, re-titled *The Mighty Thor* from 1966 and still running today with several other changes of title, as well as being a staple character in several Avengers series. The comic cycle includes a cyborg clone of Thor, named Ragnarok, who is killed and 'reborn' several times (Wallace and Forbeck 2006). The intertwining of Thor with Ragnarök is a key strand of his character, never more so in the story-line that has Thor uncover the truth about the Ragnarök cycle: 'its endless loop of creation and rebirth had been orchestrated by the godlike Those Who Sit Above in Shadow for their amusement. Unwilling to endure his people's dishonour through yet another cycle, Thor severed the tapestry that wove the reality of Asgard's dimension, wiping himself and Asgard from existence.' (Wallace and Forbeck 2006: 369).

Marvel though was unable to break the cycle resorting to bringing back Thor from the 'void of the afterlife' and so re-booting the inevitable cycle. In parallel with the later comics and updated to contemporary America (and outer-space), Thor has his on-going series of films (three to date, with *Thor: Ragnarok* the third) and a staple roll in the interconnected Avengers series of films. Thor's home world of Asgard is part of an interstellar version of the Nine Worlds. The films represent the latest upgrade in the vision of Asgard and its immortals and in which magic is simply a very complicated form of science and there is no inherent need for the people of earth to believe in the Æsir for them to exist (a sharp contrast with *American Gods*). The three Thor films also sit within two other Marvel film cycles, The

Avengers (four films to-date) and The Guardians of the Galaxy (two films to-date). From the first film – *Thor* (2011) – it is recognised that the first earth/Asgard interaction goes back to the medieval period, when the Æsir save Earth from conquest by the Frost Giants of Jotunheim in AD 955 (and a consequence of which is tied into the first *Captain America: The First Avenger* [2011] film). In this summative episode of the franchise, Odin, Thor, Loki and Hela (sic) are conceived as a dysfunctional, family group of feuding siblings, with Hela as the firstborn of Odin's children and in which Odin is a tyrannical father with a very dark past. He is an equally dark and manipulative figure in *American Gods* and Joanne Harris's novels. The Thor film franchise borrows many of the Viking/Norse stereotypes and tropes from the comic. Chief Marvel creator, Stan Lee, has been open about how such stereotypes/cultural memes fuelled his creativity (what Ross [2006, 412] has more generally characterised as 'the expression of cultural modes of thought outside Scandinavia'), recalling that with the Thor comic:

I decided readers were already pretty familiar with the Greek and Roman gods. It might be fun to delve into the old Norse legends... Besides, I pictured Norse gods looking like Vikings of old, with the flowing beards, horned helmets, and battle clubs. ...Journey into Mystery needed a shot in the arm, so I picked Thor ... to headline the book. After writing an outline depicting the story and the characters I had in mind, I asked my brother, Larry, to write the script because I didn't have time. ...and it was only natural for me to assign the pencilling to Jack Kirby... (Lee and Mair 2002)

The key trick that Marvel's take on Ragnarök manages to pull-off within this film is to permit the destruction of Asgard, with Hela, Fenris (sic) and Surtur (sic) at full throttle – a finality mainstream movies generally try to avoid. To make it palatable, the film invents a new transcendence for Thor – Hela destroys Mjölnir, but this simply allows Thor to tap into a deep, unrecognised ability to directly channel lightning, with the loss of an eye to his vengeful sister 'rebirthing' him as a sort of new Odin (echoing a story line from the later comics – summarised in Wallace and Forbeck 2014, 369). More crucially the film reconfigures the rebirth induced by Ragnarök into identifying Asgard not as a place but as a people. The rescuing of that people (led by Thor) is the act of recreation, one that borrows from the comic cycle (where Asgard is relocated to Earth, initially as a dictatorship but later, in repentance, as an island floating above America) but also from the notion of space-opera quest (notably in the Mormon theology-rich *Battlestar Galactica*), and ultimately deriving from the Biblical *Exodus*. This also serves as an echo of the European birth of America, a sort of New Asgard to which various ethnic groups bring their 'Old Asgards.'

But this proves to be a clever bit of misdirection from the Marvel team for when we see the story picked up in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) Ragnarök is enacted upon the surviving Asgardians by the appropriately named Thanos, a powerful cosmic being who believes the balance of the universe can only be restored by wiping out half of its population. We see him kill Loki and Heimdal (sic), with Thor the only survivor. In a fresh piece of invention Thor embarks upon a revenge quest against the bringer of this more lethal Ragnarök than that which is observed in *Thor: Ragnarok*. The telling of this includes a brilliantly conceptualised and visualised Nidavellir (Niðavellir). In Norse mythology this is the home of the dwarves (also known as Myrkheim), a dark abode. In its filmic re-imagining the dwarves become giants but Nidavellir remains a dark abode, now set in the dark fields of space, in the shape of a giant forging workshop built around the dark energy of a collapsing star – a feat of re-imagining on a par with Ymir's head. In Norse mythology Ymir's dismembered body was used to fashion the world. This is reconceptualised in the Marvel Universe as the spaceport Knowhere, which appears in both *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), after first appearing in comics in 2007, in Nova issue 1. Knowhere is the head of a dead, giant celestial being that lies on the outer edge of all space-time. Thor finds the dwarves of Nidavellir (who in the Marvel Universe are the size of giants) have also been massacred by Thanos, with only the master smith Eitri, minus his hands, left alive. It is here that Thor's hammer, Mjölnir, was created, and where Thor and Eitri devise and make a replacement, the mighty

axe, Stormbreaker, capable of killing Thanos. By the conclusion of *Infinity War*, the ‘half- Ragnarök’ policy of Thanos has been carried through. In an additional twist, this is reversed in the concluding fourth film, *Avengers: Endgame*, with those killed by Thanos brought back and instead Thanos and his armies sent into oblivion. In terms of new beginnings we also see the survivors of Asgard establish a New Asgard in a renamed Tønsberg, Norway.

Thor: Ragnarok also reminds us that there is a further dimension to the musical take on the Norse myths, touched on above in reference to Wagner. The soundtrack for *Thor: Ragnarok* includes, as an opener, Led Zeppelin’s *Immigrant Song*, released in 1970, and which famously makes reference to Norse mythology (including ‘the Hammer of the Gods’) and Viking seafaring. According to Daniels (2016, 23–26) it was this song that did much to create the heavy metal myth of rock bands as latter-day Viking adventurers, influencing the music visuals of many other bands including Iron Maiden, Saxon, Manowar and Amon Amarth. Rock music has cultivated a particular resonance with Viking myths, with almost a sub-genre dealing with Scandinavian mythology, both the songs and the album cover art, e.g. Bathory’s 1996 album *Blood on Ice*, the cover of which depicts Ragnarök (Trafford and Pluskowski 2007). More recently there has been a jazz suite retelling of the Norse Myths, a collaboration between Nordic and Scottish musicians and toured by the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra in 2019.

One final strand to note here in the Marvel comics and film iterations of Ragnarök is that in their, hybridised version of the Norse myth cycle, stripped out is any explicit reference to Christianity, indeed explicit supernatural forces. Here what the Norse gods are is supermen and superwomen, an alien ‘humanity’ of sophisticated technology, so sophisticated and advanced that it appears to be magic or supernatural (though not expressed in those terms). In this respect the Marvel creators were clearly influenced by Arthur C. Clarke’s so called third law of the future: ‘Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic’ (Clarke 1973: 36, and no doubt stated in awareness of previous conceptualisations of this idea, e.g. Brackett 1942: 39). Indeed, in the first *Thor* film, one of the characters, a scientist, Jane Foster (played by Natalie Portman) says to a fellow scientist that ‘magic is just science we don’t understand yet’.

The advanced science of Asgard then serves as a mirror of our future selves, giving a sense of what we become if we follow science rather than religion, with the inference that we will turn ourselves into gods and be the architects of our own destruction. This ‘men becoming gods’ turn is echoed in other comics and also digital games. The game *Ragnarok* (by Tim Korlewski and illustrator Ru-Mor), is set for issue in 2019, with the game’s objective being for a war-band of Vikings to become the new gods in the aftermath of Ragnarok. It also infuses the role-playing game series by Andrew Valkauskas: *Fate of the Norns – Ragnarok* (currently comprising *Ragnarok – Lords of the Ash*, *Ragnarok – Fafnir’s Treasure* and *Ragnarok – Denizens of the North*). The successful Japanese comic book/light novel, Takayama and Yukisan’s *The Master of Ragnarok and Blesser of Einherjar* (currently 16 volumes along with manga and anime adaptations) transports a Japanese schoolboy to the world of Ydrassil (sic), where he must lead a Viking war-band to survive.

Materialising the end: Thor’s hammer

As has already been stated the aim of this paper has not been to explicitly focus on the question of the archaeological underpinning of the popular interpretations of Ragnarök but to incorporate elements of that in the paper’s wider material culture discourse. However it is appropriate to deal with a specific example of that material culture and its archaeological underpinning. The object is Thor’s hammer, Mjölnir, central to the popular retellings of Thor’s characterisation and his attempts to halt Ragnarök. The Marvel focus is of course on its principal weapon function and symbol of heroism, which of course neglects the wider chronological and folkloric complexity of Thor’s hammer, as recorded in the Sagas, in folk tales and possibly upon rock carvings as old as the Bronze Age, which demonstrate its uses

as fertility symbol, boundary marker, rejuvenator of life, blessing of the dead and deliverer of justice (Lindow 1996: 488–491; see also Knutson 2019 on the wider role of divine objects in Norse mythology).

The Marvel comics and film adaptations give us a Thor in which Mjöllnir is almost of equal importance and an extension of his being, fitting the wider pattern (and which the comics surely helped to inspire) seen in popular culture. The closest we get to a physical manifestation of Thor's hammer in the archaeological record is a series of pendants/amulets found mainly across Scandinavia. The generally accepted interpretation of these was that they represent a 'pagan' response to increasing Christian conversion in Scandinavia (Andrén 2014: 18–20; Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 67; Wamers 1999; the idea was first postulated by Hildebrand 1872). This view has been challenged by a more nuanced view that the pattern of use of such pendants varies across Scandinavia and through time, and that two types of pendant may be distinguished: a neck ring with several hammer pendants attached and a single hammer pendant, the latter being younger and with a greater overlap with Christianity (Gräslund 2002, Nordeide 2006, Staecker 1999). The extensive series of burials from Birka, Sweden (Arbman 1943a and b) included 58 burials containing Thor's hammer pendants/amulets and at least 12 containing Christian crosses and crucifixes. Notably burials 750 and 983 both contained both cross and hammer pendants (Arbman 1943b, plates 102, 104 and 105) suggesting that the two forms of symbolic dress accessory were not necessarily in competition or conflict but could, together, be seen as a means of maximising on available supernatural aid. As a Viking Age symbol Thor's hammer perhaps remains opaque and ambiguous but today its use is recognisable as a clear indication of present day Viking paganism and identity (Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 67 and illus. p. 66).

In the comics and films the change of weapon from hammer to axe is an imaginative development not reflected in the archaeological/historical record. In *Avengers: Infinity War* the destruction of Mjöllnir is part of the reworked Ragnarök story. Both hammer and axe are the key objects through which Thor's power to channel lightning is conveyed, and contra any definitive evidence that proclaimed a belief that Thor was a thunder god or that Mjöllnir had the power to conduct lightning – Mjöllnir's name for example has several suggested etymologies encompassing 'grinder/crusher' (from *malaimola* 'to grind'), 'shining, lightning weapon' (from *mjoll* 'fresh powdery snow' and *mjalli* 'whiteness') or even 'lightning' (from the corruption of a Slavic word, *mlŭnŭji*) of which 'grinder/crusher' is probably the most persuasive (Taggart 2018: 155–164). To these newly defined powers is added the notion that Mjöllnir can only be wielded by a worthy Thor. This idea is a cross-fertilisation from the story of Arthur and the sword Excalibur. This cross-cultural affordance has been most recently visualised in the film *Hellboy* (2019). In this film (and following the narrative arc in the original Dark Horse comics) Hellboy, whose stone fist in some respects equates to Mjöllnir, is revealed as the male descendant of Arthur (through a matrilineal line from Modred's daughter) and so is the inheritor of Excalibur. In his demonic hands it becomes a flaming sword, to show its now dark side, but also affording a parallel to Mjöllnir again, as a weapon discharging supernatural energy. The Arthurian affordances are further emphasised in *Avengers: Endgame*, with Captain America perceived by the Mjöllnir as a worthy wielder alongside Thor. In the same way Captain America's shield passes on to the Falcon as a worthy successor able to wield it.

The re-imagining of Mjöllnir shares with the Viking Age its use as a symbol of Thor, but from there diverges into a hero's chosen, pseudo-science weapon, one with a certain amount of self-will and devoid of spirituality, unlike in the Viking Age it is not part of a contested and syncretised framework of beliefs – Thor is often cited as a key example of this evolving belief process, including questioning whether he ever was associated with thunder (Shaw 2019; Taggart 2017). It is linked to the virtue of Thor as a hero and so his capability to withstand Ragnarök. The Marvel Mjöllnir also helps to visually materialise Ragnarök and is a link in the archaeological sensibility of the films, one that stems from their own materiality as pieces of visual culture and from their conceptual fusion of past and future. This creates a materiality network that encompasses advanced technology, the frailty of the human body and the merging of human with artificial intelligence: in a film context all supercharged to the

point of surreality but nevertheless relatable to philosophical and practical issues that human society faces today. It is these human elements that make the films material culture meaningful and symbolic.

Ragnarök's end

To bring this excursion to a conclusion, I return to Ragnarök's literary iterations. *Tolkien Maker of Middle-Earth*, is the title of an exhibition staged by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in 2018. Its legacy is a rich catalogue, which includes a set of contextualising essays. The essay contributed by Shippey explores the northern European spirit of Tolkien's Middle-Earth corpus, with a particular debt to the Norse myths, which Tolkien recognised as unremittingly bleak and fatal, to the extent that defeat – the ultimate defeat of Ragnarök which is the doom of Gods and men – is not taken by the defeated as a refutation but provokes obstinate defiance in the face of certainty, becoming the birth of courage, described by Tolkien as 'the great contribution of Northern literature' (Shippey 2018: 59). Shippey goes on to observe that for all its glamour Tolkien recognised that this Northern spirit also presented challenges (in its heathenism and cruelty) to both humane scholarship and to his Christianity, and Shippey (2018: 63) describes Tolkien's need to 'moderate the heathen spirit, while retaining the heroic spirit' as Tolkien's major challenge. Shippey then discusses how Tolkien went about doing this pruning of the 'worst aspects of the historical Old Northern world out of his fiction' (Shippey 2018: 63). He did so not only in his Middle-Earth corpus but also in his more exegetical works, for example those that commented on *Beowulf*. Shippey (2018: 64) quotes the little known poem, *King Sheave* (not published until 1987, long after Tolkien's death), commenting that Tolkien 'saw Sheave, not his alleged descendant Scyld Scefing, as a kind of prefiguration of Christ, also sent by supernatural powers to bring hope and plenty to a darkly pagan world'. In thinking about Ragnarök in the light of Shippey's analysis, it seems clear that Tolkien's pruning of heathen fatalism extended to eschewing Ragnarök and finding, like Snorri, a Christian alternative, one that is cyclical and renewing. There is a great of destruction and sacrifice, but it is the spreading, corrupting darkness of evil Mordor that is vanquished. Within *The Lord of the Rings* this has a finality and completeness, but taken as part of the whole Middle-Earth corpus this is certainly a cyclical episode. The film trilogy adaptation by Peter Jackson (2001–2003) has a visual treatment that fully captures the sense of a world ending and being re-forged.

There is one other writer whose work we need to take account of as it most clearly embraces that Northern fatalism. A. S. Byatt's *Ragnarok* (2011) is part memoir of her Second World War childhood and part musing on the recollection of that childhood's encounter with the corpus of Norse myths. It is a beautifully poetic account and a precise, distilled re-telling of Ragnarök. Her childhood expectation that her RAF-pilot father would not return from the War was her own expectant Ragnarök, which pushed her to a belief that the original tale was utterly bleak with no hint of rebirth. Her father did return but the older writer retained her grasp of the fatalism, adding a postscript in which she sees the final Ragnarök as ushered in by humanity's inability not to destroy Earth's environment. Although Byatt takes the more pessimistic view of Ragnarök, she does weave in Snorri's more optimistic take, implicitly when she writes of warriors playing chess in Valhalla and there being such plentiful amounts of gold that the Æsir carved gold figures with which to play games of draughts and chess (Byatt 2011: 28–29) and then notably and explicitly with her final paragraph, which brings us full circle:

All there was was a flat surface of black liquid glinting in the small, pale points of light that still came through starholes. A few gold chessmen floated and bobbed on dark ripples (Byatt 2011: 144)

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to explore the conceptualisation of Ragnarök in the recent (2012–2019) filmed iterations of the Marvel Comics Universe, principally the Thor, Avengers and Guardians of the

Galaxy interlinked cycles of films. As a consequence of the contextual approach taken the immediate source material, Marvel Comics published from the 1960s onwards, was considered and in turn both films and comics were set in the wider context of the depiction of Ragnarök since medieval times, in literature, poetry, sculpture, painting and music. The fundamental importance of the Ragnarök myths to the whole cycle of Scandinavian mythology makes it ideal for this prolegomenon, arguing for the value of a wider paper or series of papers exploring the biographical trajectory of the whole Norse myth cycle – a set of stories whose appeal to modern audiences remains buoyant and which underscores senses of identity, whether ethnic, social, spiritual or political.

As a prolegomenon this study has suggested a variety of lines of enquiry that could contribute to the understanding of the reiterative, narrative trajectory of the Ragnarök myth and of the myth cycle as a whole. These include questions of the materiality of belief in the articulation of the supernatural, narrative re-invention and mythopoesis. The earliest forms and content of the Ragnarök stories remain opaque, but the hints suggest an unstable or rather an amphibolous body of material before the change of tone introduced by Christianity. The late eighteenth and nineteenth century resurgence of interest in the Vikings and their myth cycle, especially from nationalist identity perspectives further emphasised a now Protestant Christian tone whilst creating a broader body of ethnic/cultural tropes around a perceived ethnic value to being a Viking and significantly drawing on a body of distinctive material culture and its replication. Any earlier spiritual content of the original myths has been largely lost in their re-articulation and adaption in changing social circumstances and the later medieval and modern spiritual and religious overtones have been lost in the Marvel Universe. In this iteration religion has been stripped out but political attributes in tune with popular ideas about Western freedoms (notably of choice and self-definition) and with a diversity of social, gender and ethnic identities that underlie the myth of modern America as successor to and improver of European civilisation and as the world's main bastion of freedom. The social and political tensions that fracture American society are reflected in a nonetheless optimistic, liberal outlook that inspired the Marvel Comics experiment and have inevitably re-defined that Universe's Ragnarök as a more malleable business than the more fatalistic view that perhaps persists outside the concept of the Marvel Universe.

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The #GreatHeathenHunt: Repton's Public Early Medieval Archaeology

An interview with Cat Jarman

Linking her doctoral research on stable isotope analysis of the early medieval burials from Repton, Derbyshire to new fieldwork in the Vicarage Garden and at other locations in the vicinity, Dr Cat Jarman's (CJ) research into the character and extent of the camp of the 'Viking' Great Heathen Army of 873–874 has involved published academic research and a range of high-profile public engagements through social media and television documentaries. The interview was conducted via Skype on 17 June 2019 and subsequently transcribed and edited by Howard Williams (HW). The text was then shared, reviewed and citations added by CJ. The interview reflects on the origins and development of what became informally known as the Great Heathen Hunt – a search for the Viking Great Army in Derbyshire and beyond. Our discussion focuses on CJ's project's evolving and manifold intersections between research and public engagement, notably her work with television documentaries to fund her fieldwork. CJ's Great Heathen Hunt reveals the potentials and challenges of working closely with the media to perpetuate and promote academic research into the Viking Age. As such, this interview constitutes perhaps a rare example of published academic and critical discussion of early medieval archaeology's interactions with the media.

Introduction

HW: First of all, thank you for agreeing to do this interview. The aim is to explore your early medieval archaeological research's interactions with the media and social media, and then to edit down and structure the interview text with your additional contributions. I hope this will create a distinctive medium for discussing the public and media engagements of your work.

CJ: I appreciate being able to try out this format because time constraints mean that I wouldn't otherwise be able to contribute: hence, this is the only way to be involved. I also think it is a nice strategy for discussing ongoing work and should make for an interesting read. The inclusion of dense same-format chapters in contributions can mean critical issues and debates get missed.

HW: I feel this could work as a discrete means of debating specific early medieval projects, especially in the light of the dearth of sustained academic discussion regarding media engagements in early medieval archaeology. For while, particularly over the two decades, there have been sustained discussions of archaeology in the media (Ascherson 2004; Bonacchi 2013; Brittain and Clack 2007; Morgan 2014) and how we work with social media (e.g. Bonacchi 2017; Perry and Beale 2015), the particular challenges of telling stories about the Early Middle Ages via television documentaries and digital environments have received little consideration (see also Tong *et al.* 2015).

Background

HW: How did you get into archaeology? Please outline your career path and outline your specialisms?

CJ: Much of my career path has been accidental but it has led me in a really interesting direction. I started off studying architecture, mainly with an interest in historic buildings, but realised this wasn't for me. It was actually an archaeology documentary on television that reignited my interest in the past and led me to change careers. So TV has been a big part in my own career from the start! Growing up in Norway, there was no archaeology on TV, so while I had a strong interest in history (especially from going to Oslo's archaeological museums, including the world-famous Viking Ship Museum), I had no sense of how I could develop this interest into a career. But seeing how it worked as a subject on TV in a programme that featured archaeologists as investigators helped me to see this was a possible career path.

Having made the career-change, I completed a degree in Archaeology at Bristol University. I then went off to pursue work in other fields – including museums and outreach – because at the time, jobs in archaeology were few and far between, before returning to pursue a Masters in Archaeology at the University of Oslo. My Masters project focused on bioarchaeology and stable isotope analysis, despite the fact that I hadn't previously developed a knowledge or expertise in relevant scientific fields. I was encouraged to do this by one of the lecturers at Bristol, who asked me whether I could cook; Chemistry, he said, was more or less the same thing. I was encouraged to take forward a lab-based scientific post-graduate research project.

Following a steep learning curve and working with some of the best biochemistry labs in the world, I learned how I could apply stable isotope analysis to archaeological questions. This gave me a solid understanding in the methods of stable isotope analysis along with its potentials and limitations. Alongside my PhD work I also got the opportunity to work on a separate NSF-funded research project exploring diet and resource use on Rapa Nui with the University of Hawaii, after taking part in a specialist training course in Stable Isotopes run by the University of Utah. My first research project focused on studying mobility and diet from Norwegian Viking Age human remains, where there was a clear gap in research at the time. This subsequently led me to the early medieval material at Repton, and the human remains were accessed for stable isotope analysis as the focus of my doctoral research back at Bristol.

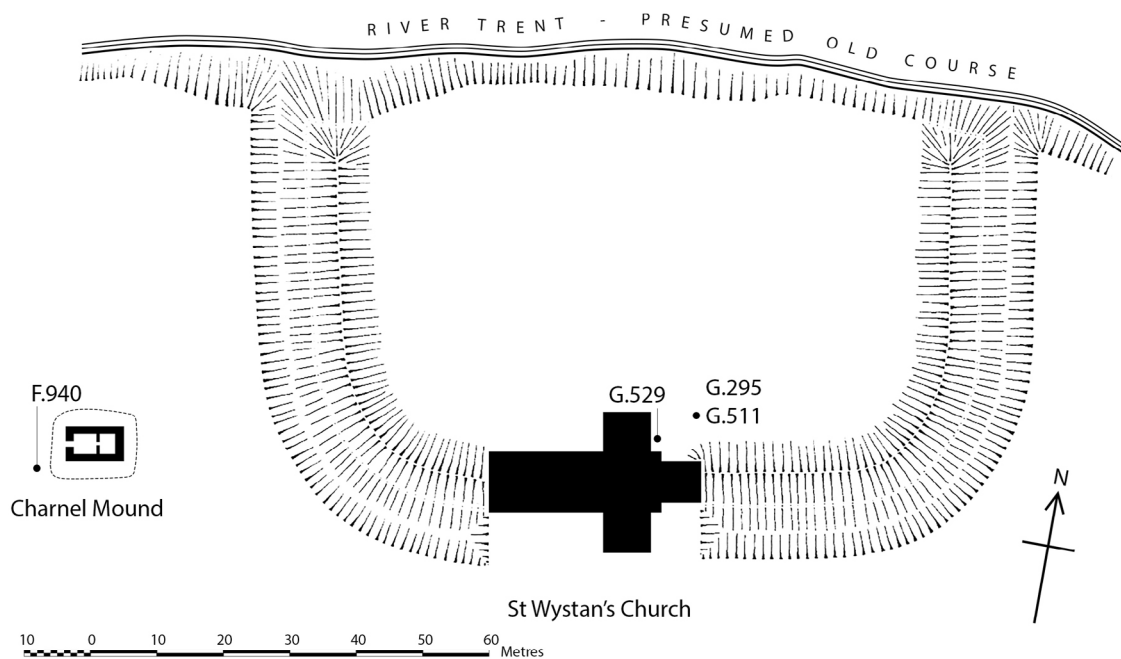


Figure 1: Plan of discoveries at Repton during Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle's excavation, showing St Wystan's church, the reconstructed defensive ditch around it, the charnel deposit to the west, and the individual Scandinavian graves surrounding the church (Jarman *et al.* 2018)

The site was first investigated in the 1970s and '80s by Martin Biddle and his late wife Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, who initially wanted to investigate the church and its origins as part of a 7th-century Merician monastery. Repton is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a site of the Great Heathen Army's winter camp for the year 873, and the excavations by Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle uncovered a series of inhumations with distinctly Scandinavian artefacts, a massive ditch interpreted as a part of a defensive fortification, and a charnel deposit of at least 264 people and Viking-type artefacts underneath a shallow burial mound (Figure 1) (Martin Biddle, *et al.* 1986; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1985, 1992, 2001;

Biddle *et al.* 1986). Coins dated both one of the graves and the charnel to the 870s, yet radiocarbon dates of the bones seemed to suggest some were buried several hundred years earlier. This led to a debate on whether the charnel bones really were those of the Viking army, as the investigators proposed (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001), or whether instead, they were simply the reinterred remains of Anglo-Saxon monastic graves disturbed by the Viking destructions (e.g. Richards 2005; Richards *et al.* 2004).

Early on in my doctoral project, it became clear that a focus only on the bioarchaeology of the Repton graves was insufficient to fully explore key questions about the Great Heathen Army's presence at this Mercian minster church in 873–874. Consequently, the archaeological fieldwork at Repton and its environs was a spin-off developing from investigations of the dating and character of the human remains of the excavations of Martin and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle's long-term field investigations (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 2001). My doctoral study's first published output took place in early 2018 in the journal *Antiquity* (Jarman *et al.* 2018), offering a re-dating of the remains and confirming the likelihood of a close association between the furnished inhumation graves around the church, and the mass-grave within the two-celled chapel in the Vicarage Garden, as evidence of the Great Heathen Army's presence.

Public engagement and the Great Heathen Army in the contemporary landscape

HW: I think it is very important that readers appreciate how media opportunities emerged and interacted with your desk-/lab-based research, and subsequently your fieldwork, on this prominent early medieval archaeological site. How did #GreatHeathenHunt begin as a fieldwork project in relation to your doctoral research?

CJ: The fieldwork project came about when I realised that the isotope analyses were not going to answer all of the questions we had about the Great Heathen Army at Repton. When I started, many – myself included – thought the bioarchaeology was going to be a 'silver bullet', but it became clear that we needed to look again at the archaeology of Repton in more detail. The main research question I started out with was to ascertain whether bioarchaeology could support the hypothesis that the charnel dead were members of the Great Heathen Army. Crucially, I also wanted to find out what the full impact of the Vikings was in Repton, both in terms of the Great Heathen Army's winter camp in 873–874 and potentially later in the 9th and early 10th centuries. It turned out that the data I could get from the bones were inconclusive and couldn't confirm the identities of the Repton dead. Consequently, I needed to find out what the circumstances of the burials were and how the winter camp related to the Anglo-Saxon monastery and the site's later use.

I got the opportunity to do this following two public engagements that facilitated the project, which informally became known as the 'Great Heathen Hunt' (subsequently as a Twitter hashtag #GreatHeathenHunt).

First, I gave a public lecture to the Derbyshire Archaeological Society in 2013, a year into the PhD. The vicar of Repton, Rev. Martin Flowerdew, was in the audience and asked several questions at the end. Afterwards, he emailed me welcoming me to visit the vicarage if I was interested in continuing fieldwork if the opportunity arose. This was an important lesson of engaging with local communities regarding doctoral research: not only did it give me an opportunity to get to know those living in the area, but it also gave them the chance to get to know me and my project.

Second, soon after, I contributed towards a documentary called *Real Vikings* (2016) on the History Channel, which was about the archaeology behind the drama series *Vikings*. As a part of this, the production team asked if there was any fieldwork I could do as a part of that programme and they would help with funding. Through subsequent negotiations, the production paid for me and two colleagues to spend three days carrying out a geophysical survey of the Vicarage Garden with a film crew present. This gave us the opportunity to connect with the vicar again, taking him up on his generous offer. We found lots

of features in our geophysical survey and an anonymous donor, inspired by the programme, gave further funding to extend the fieldwork into an excavation for two weeks in June 2016, which was followed by a further three seasons of excavations in subsequent successive summers. We also had a visit from the creator of *Vikings*, Michael Hirst, during the 2016 excavations (Figure 2)

It needs pointing out that this all took place before my first academic publication on the Repton research (Jarman *et al.* 2018), although I have previously published my bioarchaeological research on Rapa Nui (Easter Island) (Fehren-Schmitz *et al.* 2017; Jarman *et al.* 2017). The 2018 publication on the Repton radiocarbon dates (Jarman *et al.* 2018) inspired subsequent media interest which, in turn, led to further fieldwork sustained by it. When the paper came out, we sent out a press release about the research, supported by the journal *Antiquity*'s press officer. Although we deliberately aimed to get widespread attention, the level of interest in this research, both in the UK and globally, still took me by surprise. So a high-profile *Antiquity* journal article, combined with Bristol University's press release, generated global and intense interest in the story of early medieval Repton despite the paper being simply about new radiocarbon dates on a rather old project. I feel its popularity stemmed from the fact the research hit a perfect storm of media narratives, linking the results of new scientific methods with the widespread popularity of the Vikings, and because the research 'solved' an old 'mystery'. These tropes came together and amplified the media interest considerably, likely also strengthened by the appearance of the Birka 'warrior women' article only a few months earlier (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017).

Subsequently, eight production companies got in touch with me about creating a documentary about the Great Heathen Army at Repton: a seemingly familiar site and an 'old' research project were reinvigorated.



Figure 2: The 2016 excavation team with community volunteers and Rev. Martin Flowerdew, visited by *Vikings* creator Michael Hirst (Photo: C. Jarman)

HW: What is your evaluation of how the story of Repton's Anglo-Saxon and Viking archaeology has been narrated for the public prior to your fieldwork? (including Repton church, Heath Wood, Derby Museum, and the landscape context)



Figure 3: The Anglo-Saxon crypt in St Wystan's Church (Photo: M. Horton)

CJ: Despite the fieldwork being well known among Anglo-Saxon and Viking specialists, I think it had never been told very coherently as a story for public consumption. Partly, this was because there were very different strands to the narrative of Repton's Anglo-Saxon royal church and the Great Heathen Army's overwintering there in 873-874. Still, the fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s had a lot of interest from the media nationally. However, there is a legacy collection of the material from Repton that hasn't been fully published, which has inhibited the broader dissemination. Meanwhile, excavation work took place at a cremation cemetery at Heath Wood in the neighbouring parish of Ingleby in the early 2000s, which uncovered at least 59 cremation mounds with Scandinavian grave-goods, thought also to relate to the Great Army's presence in the region (Richards *et al.* 2004). This was rather separate from the work by Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle and wasn't fully incorporated into the story of Repton more widely.

Derby Museum, which holds the artefacts from both Repton and Heath Wood, have had its own relatively small-scale exhibitions. These are accurate and reasonably up-to-date, but they don't necessarily give the big picture. This isn't really the museum's fault as they have struggled to contend with a partially published excavation archive, made more difficult by Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle's untimely death.

Meanwhile, the church was wishing to tell its own story, focusing on the Anglo-Saxon history and architecture of the building, including its Anglo-Saxon crypt (Figure 3) and upstanding walls incorporated into a living place of worship through a small guidebook although this has not been updated with recent research (Ferne 2018; Taylor 1989). Once again on a relatively small scale, restricting the broader appeal of the story caused, in part, by a combination of unpublished material and the lack of anyone with the time, authority, and resources to incorporate all the different strands

Pulling these strands together, while I inherited a situation with one coherent archaeological research project at Repton, I inherited a fragmented story. This was a situation no doubt enhanced by the debate surrounding the radiocarbon dating, with many questioning the mass-grave's association with the Great Heathen Army and more recent questions of whether the defensive enclosure really did contain the winter camp at all (Richards 2005; Richards, *et al.* 2004; Stein 2014). Up to this point, no one had really drawn together the whole story, especially given that there were conflicting agencies and views. An exception is perhaps the occasional television documentary. Notably, *Blood of the Vikings* (2001) had attempted to pull together the Repton story and conduct new research too.

As a result, when one visits Repton, there is nothing there to tell you the 'Viking' story, let alone the relationship between that story and the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical landscape: there are plenty of interested parties, but there is currently no central place for the broader story.

HW: What was the 'digital footprint' of scholarly research on Repton, Mercia and the Vikings before your involvement?

CJ: This was also very fragmented and limited, and what was available online was written by various people with different interests, who were not necessarily able to synthesise all the pertinent knowledge. There was a page by Steve Bivans, an author with an interest in Vikings, who had written quite an extensive discussion of Repton's early medieval past (Bivans 2014), and the church has its own webpage with relatively accurate information, including an edited version of an article on the Vikings in Repton (Marsden 2007). I originally started writing a blog on my research to help this problem, but I lacked the time and resources to continue.

HW: What has your local/regional engagement strategy been for the GHH fieldwork?

CJ: As mentioned above, I started out by giving a talk to the Derbyshire Archaeological Society early on in my doctoral research, and have since spoken on numerous occasions to community groups, including the Council for British Archaeology East Midlands. There is also a local history group, the Repton Historical Society, who have been very involved and supportive of the research and who work with the

church and the community. Their volunteers work on site with us during our fieldwork (Figure 2) and I normally give very well attended talks each year in the village hall. I've tried very hard to include local people who have wished to participate, as well as those visiting the excavations, although this brought some challenges. Notably, as a small scale doctoral project, managing not only a research project and excavation team alongside untrained volunteers is actually a big undertaking, which requires not only archaeological expertise but also managerial skills. With limited time and budgets, it proved impossible to accommodate all those who wanted to take part.

I've had some limited involvement with Repton School: this is a private school dating back to the 16th century that is located next to St Wystan's Church and it incorporates part of what was likely the Viking camp within its grounds. The school has been enthusiastic in principle but as of yet, haven't had time to incorporate any of the archaeology into their curriculum. I've had a lot of help from the school archivist, though, in relation to historic documents they hold within their library. This includes records of various amateur excavations carried out by their pupils back in the 1950s and the identification of a 1920s school uniform button found in the vicarage garden.

However, regarding all these local groups, the relationships require careful management. There is an ongoing tension between giving them their own autonomy to research and explore their own village, but at the same time, what they do needs to feed in to but not interfere with core research objectives. For instance, historically, in the 20th century several amateur excavations were carried out in the village by enthusiasts without properly recording the results. The artefacts from these are long gone with only some vague photos remaining, meaning that the information is sadly entirely lost; there is always a concern that this might happen again in the future.

HW: Have you worked with school groups and if so, how effective and how does it differ from the general public?

CJ: In Repton, I've sadly not been able to be involved with schools like the local village primary school, mainly because I don't live locally. I've engaged with schools elsewhere about my research, though, which has been a very positive and rewarding experience.

I've had discussions with Derby Museum's education department, which has programs relating to archaeology and the Vikings. There is great potential for developing this further in future. There is the need for time, energy, funding and coordination to adequately sustain and extend such activities and to date, this simply hasn't been possible. As usual, there are limitations to what can be done within any public engagement dimensions of a research project of this scale.

HW: Many will be interested in how this media interest and digital engagement might translate into longer-term local and regional awareness and engagement with the early medieval past. Are there plans for new heritage interpretations stemming from your fieldwork?

CJ: It would be great if this were to happen in future, but nothing has been planned in any formal way as yet. At the moment, I'm not in a position to professionally take anything forward in relation to time and funding. This is a good example of what often happens at the end of a PhD in academia, if one is not part of a broader project: Engagements can easily fizzle out. There is a lot of enthusiasm from the local community to take something like this forward but there isn't currently anyone with the authority or resources to do so.

Some positive discussions have involved both representatives from the church and diocese as well as Repton School on an idea of creating a Museum of Repton or a Museum of Mercia, focusing on the site and its broader history. The question of what happens to the Vicarage and its garden in the long term is still open: the dream would be for it to be converted into a museum and research centre that draws all the strands of evidence together. In short, we require a physical space, as well as digital dimensions,



Figure 4: Filming *Digging for Britain* with Alice Roberts in September 2017 (Photo: C. Jarman)

that could be used to curate and display the archaeological collections of earlier fieldwork and also to sustain and develop the new investigations. Again, we are lacking the resources and ability to take this forward.

A further issue of Repton is that all the initiatives to date didn't come from one central authority or institution, but came from my energies linked to my specific research questions that have evolved over time. This has also meant I've had to beg and borrow to get appropriate funds to make the project work.

HW: How has your public engagement differed from other early medieval archaeology projects you are aware of?

CJ: I think one major difference has been that I have had a pretty heavy involvement with international media, including TV, throughout the process. This is pretty rare for similar-scaled projects. I think the main reason why Repton has garnered more interest than similar projects is that there's already a well-defined and recognisable story (the Great Heathen Army's attack on a monastery; Viking burials with grave-goods; the mystery of the charnel) alongside ongoing research featuring new scientific methods. A project that comes to mind with some parallels is the work on Lindisfarne by Durham University and DigVentures¹, which has had a strong digital presence, working with the community, as well as operating within academic research questions. It is also one that links to a well-known and evocative place and name linked to early medieval England, with similar connotations for both the Anglo-Saxon (Northumbrian) story and the Viking perspective. Many projects, conversely, are very research driven and the public engagement is subsidiary or peripheral although increasingly, more research projects now have a profile on social media and through blogs.

¹ <https://digventures.com/lindisfarne/>

Public engagement via media and social media

HW: What best practices in terms of public engagement would you advocate?

CJ: While this is not necessarily what I *have* done, as the project has been a learning experience for me: I think it is very important to work out, as early as possible, who your audience is and what objectives you hope to reach through your public engagement. Is it the local community, or is it a wider knowledge transfer with specific messages for this broader audience (national, international, global)? Then, you can look at what strategies you can adopt to achieve these objectives. The people who attend the Derbyshire Archaeological Society meetings, for example, are likely to be a different audience from those following my Twitter account (@CatJarman). With my research, in addition to engaging with the local community, I wanted to go very wide, so hence the focus on my media work. Press releases, in this regard, are very powerful. They have the potential to go very far, as taking an end-of-dig interim or academic publication to a University press officer can be a good way to get information out there in the public sphere in an official capacity.

I also think it's important to have a digital presence in some way. For me, the main focus has been engagement through Twitter, because it is quick and easy and doesn't require you to be a member of a particular group. For example, some other fora, like Facebook pages and groups, may require you to not only have joined Facebook but also be a member a particular group to see posts. While this is to some degree the case for Twitter too, as your 'followers' are most likely to see your content, it is at least available and openly searchable. I've also been able to connect with a number of journalists through Twitter, which has resulted in interviews both in the Washington Post (Ellis Nutt 2017) and on BBC radio.

I would also promote two podcast interviews I did with HistoryHit as a good example of digital engagement. HistoryHit is a new digital history channel created by broadcaster Dan Snow, producing both its own history documentaries through a subscription and streaming model as well as a very successful free to access podcast. I featured on the podcast twice², first about the Repton radiocarbon dates in 2018 and then with a follow-up following the documentary Britain's Viking Graveyard, which featured my PhD research in 2019. For the first podcast, the HistoryHit team turned a transcription into a website article which increased its accessibility³. A major benefit of this recent initiative in digital engagement is that you can access the metrics of engagement (as with a blog). This isn't necessarily a reliable way of understanding impact, but for example, soon after the podcast appeared, just after the publication in *Antiquity*, it had been listened to 80,000 times - full listens from beginning to end. The second, follow up, had 50,000 listens in the first week.⁴ What I particularly liked about the HistoryHit format is that it is less 'precious' and contrived than many television documentaries: it gives you condensed and clear information from the expert without it having to feed into a pre-existing scripted narrative for a show. Hopefully, the channel will continue to grow, allowing for a new way for researchers to share their work.

HW: Outline your involvement in TV archaeology and its relationships with your fieldwork

CJ: The first programme I took part in was the previously mentioned *Real Vikings*, which was followed by *Digging for Britain* on BBC4, filmed in June 2017. This programme happened by chance: I tweeted about our excavations in Repton and was contacted by one of the show's producers asking if we'd be interested in taking part. The team gave us a camera and we recorded what we wanted to share. This was followed by a studio day and some further filming back at the University (Figure 4). This was a useful way of sharing the fieldwork, tying it in with the radiocarbon dates and stable isotope work. My participation in this also had a much unexpected but very positive outcome, as it led to the discovery of an entirely new Viking site. Through Twitter, discussing the show, I was put in touch with a metal-detectorist who had found Viking-

² <http://www.historyhit.com/vikings>

³ <https://www.historyhit.com/was-repton-home-to-the-fearsome-viking-force-the-great-heathen-army/>

⁴ <https://tv.historyhit.com/watch/34825943>



Figure 5: Behind the scenes shots from the filming of *Britain's Viking Graveyard* in June 2018 (Photos: C. Jarman)

period artefacts nearby. I had previously attempted to make links with the metal-detecting community, but I had struggled. There was nothing recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) from the area to give a clue that there might have been any Viking-period activity in the vicinity of Repton at all. But through the social media exchange, I made contact with the metal-detectorist, who, it turned out, had found a highly significant new Viking camp. By pure chance, I was in Repton filming another documentary for the Discovery Channel, *Unearthed*, in January 2018, when I first met the detectorist. The production team I was working with learned of the discovery and wanted to make a full-length documentary about the new site and related research. This led to the TV documentary *Britain's Viking Graveyard* on Channel 4 (*The Lost Viking Army* on PBS/NOVA), which also provided funding for further fieldwork (Figure 5). So again, my involvement with TV not only provided me with much needed funding for fieldwork, but it also directly resulted in new discoveries that pushed forward my research.

HW: We've discussed press releases and TV programmes, but what about the broader media: how this relates to the most directed, authored public engagements you discuss above? Outline the degree of press attention linked to these and your academic research.

CJ: As discussed above, the press release relating to the radiocarbon dating paper was a collaboration between Bristol's press office and the journal *Antiquity*. The fact that it came from a prestigious journal seemed to lend weight to the press release, and this may well be why it got so much attention. In general, the media coverage was pretty faithful to the content of the press release, which was a relief. A problem was with the way some articles stated that the new radiocarbon dates *proved* these bones belonged to the Great Heathen Army; of course, they prove no such thing but merely support the hypothesis, as the former confusion over the seemingly early dates was removed. While many news headlines stated the 'mystery' had now been 'solved', most articles included some form of caution in the text and many included my quotes to say that we cannot be certain of the identification.

A notable distinction is that, in contrast to digital media, the local media interest in the Repton stories has mainly been radio, especially Radio Derbyshire. In my case, it seems like the press – newspapers and online articles – came first and the TV followed. My experience has been that the producers of TV documentaries became aware of the stories after seeing them online.

A big challenge of working with TV in particular is that they typically want a 'scoop' – something new and exclusive – something you haven't yet shared. This can be challenging as they may impose an embargo. For *Britain's Viking's Graveyard*, for instance, I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement until the programme came out. This meant holding off 9 months on sharing my new discoveries, which was in tension with my desire to engage the public in the latest findings. On the plus side, it gave me some time to consolidate the research and discover the full story before sharing it more widely.

HW: How would you evaluate their strengths and potentials of this kind of media/press engagement, from funding and public education to your academic profile and career?

CJ: I feel that the media interest in Repton and the Vikings has benefitted me immensely, both in terms of my research progress and for my personal career.

First, this is because I want to do more media work as a mode of public engagement. Had I wanted to just work in isolation on a traditional monograph, then it would not have helped in the slightest – in fact, it would probably have been more of a hindrance. But all the documentaries I have taken part in have had very positive outcomes and have led to further opportunities, whilst also giving me invaluable experience in how to communicate research and handle relationships with a wide range of interested parties.

Second, the media interest has provided me with funding: most of my fieldwork has been funded by either production companies or private donors as a result of TV appearances. Finally, I am now working on a non-fiction book aimed at the general public, a so-called 'trade book' (i.e. non-academic), due to be published by HarperCollins. I think the widespread media attention around my research really helped convince the publishers that there was a market for it, which is an obvious benefit.

I've felt it was important to maintain an academic profile alongside the public engagement and media work beyond my doctoral research, though. There is a lot of pressure to produce academic publications as well, and I am painfully aware that the public engagement outputs count for little when applying for post-docs and academic jobs. There is also the fear that it will hinder one in detracting from looking 'serious' and academic. For early career researchers in particular, facing a precarious job market, this is often a reason many are cautious about spending too much time on public engagement activities.

HW: What are the key challenges and pitfalls that you've faced in relation to both fieldwork and broader public engagements with the Viking period and its archaeology?



Figure 6: Megan Fox in Repton during the filming of *Legends of the Lost* in June 2018 (Photo: C. Jarman)

CJ: The key challenge I've been faced with is time: one has to commit a considerable amount of time to follow through and answer questions, to go out and give lectures and talks to disseminate results, to keep up relationships and to maintain the profile of the research project. Another challenge is the need to retain a simple story: keeping a balance between a simple story that is coherent and easy to understand with something that is nuanced and true to the historical and archaeological evidence. In relation to fieldwork, there is often a desire from external audiences to have a rapid interpretation, explaining how new evidence fits into the bigger picture, for example when giving a lecture to the local historical society at the end of a dig. The same was the case for my participation in *Digging for Britain* when I had to condense and interpret new findings pretty much immediately. Often we don't really know the significance of new evidence until much later, so it can be difficult not to give a false story. The balance is about simplicity and clarity. For the Viking Age more broadly, a challenge is that both the media and the general public often want new evidence to fit with existing narratives, often ones they have been taught a long time ago.

HW: Have you had backlash against those that don't like the story with a public relevance and don't want to engage?

CJ: I've been lucky so far in that I haven't had a lot of criticism for my public engagement, at least not that I am aware of. The most challenging story has been related to the Viking warrior women theme: this was a story that really polarised people, both academics and the public. The debate centred on whether or not women could really be "warriors" during the Viking Age, which is relevant to Repton as the charnel grave contained the bones of around 20 % women. This has, of course, been a popular theme for TV productions. I've tried to be quite balanced in academic fora, giving a more nuanced view of the evidence from Repton, whilst trying to be more accessible on TV. Although there have been criticisms



Figure 7: Filming Bj. 581, the 'Birka Warrior Woman', with Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson in Stockholm Museum for Britain's Viking Graveyard in October 2018 (Photo: C. Jarman)

of some of these shows more broadly, in particular *Legends of the Lost* with Megan Fox (Figure 6) where I discuss the women from Repton, I have been spared any personal backlash on my participation to date.

While I've not been in a position of any serious misrepresentation, I do know that my radiocarbon dating research has been used in a creationist magazine article as an example to prove that *all* radiocarbon dating is wrong, thereby supporting a creationist perspective on the origins of the world (Johnson 2018). This rather odd take suggests that because the Repton radiocarbon dates were initially incorrectly interpreted when marine reservoir effects weren't accounted for, *all* radiocarbon dates should be disregarded. The author has misunderstood – perhaps deliberately – that the point of the research is that we now *do* understand why they were incorrect to start with. It does, however, reveal how we cannot future-proof the ways in which people may appropriate and interpret our research.

My most common point of contact relates to DNA research, where people who have taken a DNA test themselves and have their genetic ancestry information want to know if they are related to the Vikings and usually specific individuals. There are those who also want me to identify connections between the Repton graves and other Viking-period burials, to prove various theories that they have. There is a broad and intense thirst for people to link themselves to the Viking past and many wish to receive and use specific scientific data to prove these points. This is very much the legacy of the Richard III study and is in many cases problematic. 20 generations back you have over a million ancestors so this sort of information is fairly meaningless: anyone alive in the late 9th century who had children has too many descendants to count. This interest is partially fostered by commercial DNA companies, who are linking the Vikings to various cultural and racial stereotypes. In extreme cases, this is used by white supremacists to promote their view of an ethnically superior 'Viking' culture. Personally, I haven't yet come across this being used in an explicitly racist and extremist way, but it is an element of a broader desire for biological origins (Booth 2018).

HW: Outline your social media use for the project. Where do you see social media fitting into these public engagement strategies?

CJ: Twitter has been my primary social media engagement. I'd like to do more and have started to look at other platforms in more detail, including Instagram, as they're likely to all reach slightly different audiences. A fear with all of social media is that it can be somewhat self-limiting: tweets and posts are usually seen by my followers only, meaning it can end up being a bit of an echo chamber that reaches a very specific sub-set of people. More recently, I've experimented with live videos and video tours of my excavations, which has been very successful: some have been viewed more than 11,000 times. What seems particularly appealing with this format is that it allows people to follow discoveries as they happen. A good example of a project posting updates from the field is the Norwegian *Secrets of the Ice* project⁵, which surveys and collects artefacts melting out of glaciers in Oppland, Norway. I find myself following their updates at the edge of my seat!

Using social media successfully requires both knowledge and skill and isn't as easy as it might first seem. It would be informative to learn from the approaches taken by others who use social media very successfully, like 'influencers' who often have millions of followers. We need to recognise that they have skills that we can learn from and if we too want to engage on that level, we have to find ways of learning and experimenting with new ways to disseminate our research.

HW: What of further digital engagements? For example, do you have a website and other digital dimensions, including contributions to Wikipedia? Do you regard open-access academic publishing as public engagement and sufficient without other dimensions?

CJ: Open access is extremely important as it is a way in which anyone, anywhere, can read and assess our research. However, no matter how well we write, academic publications aren't going to be accessible enough to the vast majority of people. Even as an academic, I often struggle to fully comprehend literature in other fields and I don't always have the time and energy to read, understand, and synthesise entire papers that require me to learn a whole new set of terminology. We can't just assume that our language, our jargon, and our way of thinking, is universally accessible. The Bj581 'Viking warrior woman' article (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017), for example, was read and misunderstood in part by many because of the ways in which certain elements were phrased, or because of the way certain information was presented (Figure 7).

In this regard, the website *The Conversation* is quite good, as it provides short articles summarising academic research. You have to have academic credentials to write for them, which gives the website a vetting process, and articles go through an editing process too. You can also provide links to the full research papers within the text. I wrote for them about my research on Rapa Nui after I was approached by an editor who had seen the press around my open-access paper (Jarman *et al.* 2017), and who asked me to write a summary on the latest research about the island. The article had a great response: it was read over 200,000 times online and was picked up by the print edition of the *I* newspaper, which has a circulation of around 200,000 issues. This is a great reach for what might otherwise only be reported in academic fora, and provided me with an easy way to translate and summarise academic research into something more accessible and readable. A similar approach is a desirable priority of the Great Heathen Hunt in the near future.

Archaeological magazines are useful in this sense too, but tend to cater to a niche audience. The readers of these are generally people who already have a strong interest in the subject, and who would most likely find out about the work anyway. I've written for both *British Archaeology* (Jarman 2018) and *Current Archaeology* (Jarman 2019), and in both cases was approached by the editors in response to the press attention on my work. A benefit of writing for these has been that they allowed me to summarise

⁵ <https://secretsoftheice.com/>



Figure 8: *Vikings* creator Michael Hirst (right) and Jan Bill, Professor of Viking Age Archaeology and curator of the Viking Ship Collection at the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo (left), visiting the Viking Ship Museum in May 2016 (Photo: C. Jarman)

a lot of my research in a way that other venues, like academic publications, cannot. However, it's hard to judge how much actual impact such articles have made. Print issues of five-figures are not to be dismissed, but it is far smaller than other digital venues. I'm interested in getting my research noticed outside these (relatively) informed groups though, and feel that digital platforms might have more of a potential to do so. It's important that we try to find ways to reach those who might otherwise be exposed to extremist or confused ideas.

I would love to have a more permanent public facing, reliable online presence – website or blog – for Repton, but so far, that has been beyond my capacity to create.

HW: What would you regard as good practice for digital and media engagement in archaeology, thinking particularly of early medieval, and mortuary, themes?

CJ: Working with human remains is a very contentious issue and being respectful of the fact we are dealing with dead people, which is something that audiences may have different opinions on, is important (e.g. Ulgium 2018; Williams and Atkin 2015; Williams 2018). I don't personally have an issue with sharing images

of skeletons to illustrate an argument and actually think it is important that we do this in an informed and reasonable manner. Showing skeletal material e.g. on TV gets to dimensions that we cannot get at if we talk in the abstract. However, I don't think we should do so unless the human remains are making a point. I would never pose with human remains, post pictures purely for artistic reasons, or make jokes about them. Human remains can be a mode of engaging people properly with the academic research, and so should be used. However, we all have to navigate these complex issues in our own terms. Context is significant: For example, there is a huge difference on how human remains are viewed on Rapa Nui and in when found in Viking-period contexts in Europe and the North Atlantic. We have to be very aware of different cultural and geographical contexts we are operating across, especially in digital fora.

Dealing with fiction, fantasy and extremism

HW: Do you feel that it is, on balance, helping or hindering to have fictional Viking worlds on TV and in video games and other fictional realms?

CJ: Personally, I think it is hugely positive since it is really engaging people, simultaneously providing a platform for people to take their interest and curiosity further. Without the fictional Vikings, I don't think I would have had as much media interest or funding for my research, so I have a lot to thank them for.

There is, however, a tension over authenticity, and how people use the fictional realms. However, I think we often over-exaggerate the problem and don't always give enough credit to people with an interest in the Vikings via these media: people understand more than we think, they know what they are consuming is fiction based on some historical and archaeological material. I think we have a bigger problem with getting people to fund the humanities than worrying about stories being mis-told in fictional TV-shows and books. These media give us an opportunity to evaluate the shows and to engage by showing the reality – as we know it – behind the fiction. You can use the TV shows as a way into conversations about what is right and wrong. Most of the things they do get 'wrong' don't really matter. For example, the portrayal of forks in use in 9th-century Paris was heavily criticised by some viewers of the TV show *Vikings* (2013–) when most people do not care. It is a positive time for intersections between media and archaeology.

A way forward is to try and make resources more easily available to the researchers who create these fictional worlds. Via my personal engagement with Michael Hirst I was given the opportunity to visit Ashford Studios in Wicklow, Ireland when the *Vikings* show was in production. There, I saw how the different departments, like the costume and set designers were working – they typically research and Google, using the accessible information for inspiration; historical advisors weren't used to confirm the details. I also accompanied Hirst on a research trip to Norway, visiting notable archaeological sites in May 2016 (Figure 8). If reliable information isn't available to the creators of fictional Viking spheres, then results will be wrong. I do believe that we have to make our research accessible and available for this very reason, it's no good just criticising the end result if we haven't done so.

HW: Which prejudices, stereotypes and misunderstandings of the Early Middle Ages have you encountered, and which are most problematic? Where do you draw the line on 'artistic license'?

CJ: I guess the most problematic is the racial supremacy issue, and the idea that the Vikings were superior to other groups and nations, as a homogeneous group who didn't interact with other religions and other people. This isn't something I've encountered directly but if my research was used in any way to support such ideas, I would need to engage with it (see Elliott 2017; Niklasson and Hølleland 2018; Williams *et al.* this volume).

In terms of my own research, I find that the way women are dealt with in the Viking Age is often problematic. While there might be issues with the 'warrior women' narrative, I find the last 30 years or more's lack of engagement with other stereotypes more problematic, including underplaying women's possible roles in travel and trade. Indeed, women are often excluded from all of these spheres of mobility

(see also Arwill-Nordbladh 1991). Their key roles in the migrations of the early medieval period need to be carefully critiqued and bioarchaeological evidence is helping to support these notions. In fact, this is one of the key areas where I hope my future work will make an ongoing contributions to both academic and popular understandings of the Viking world.

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Vikings and Virality

Matthew Thomas

Contemporary popular understandings of the early medieval period are frequently shaped by dramatised depictions on television and film, with newspaper and online articles often providing popularized factual coverage. If academics provide material targeted for dissemination through such means they may contribute to greater public awareness of the period. This chapter investigates insights gained into the questions asked by the public about the Early Middle Ages by using two statistical data sets derived from online data. First, I collate common search engine queries relating to a selection of early medieval terms ('Viking', 'Saxon' and 'Pict'); second, I evaluate the sum 'virality' of posts across social media networks relating to the same search term.

Introduction

This chapter explores how early medieval archaeological information can be produced to address popular digital queries and themes, thus countering pseudoarchaeological and political extremist narratives and allowing our public engagement to be responsive to digital demands. This touches on how the digital media might better promote early medieval archaeological research by creating engaged online debates between early medievalists and the public. These ideas are investigated using insights gained from analysis of a statistical data set aggregating the sum virality of articles relating to a relevant early medieval term ('Viking', 'Saxon', 'Pict') posted during 2017 across social media networks. This is followed by a case study of the most widely shared piece of content in the study, media reports on the 2017 *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* article about chamber grave Bj581 from Birka, Sweden (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017); in so doing this provides an avenue to explore how and why particular early medieval archaeology stories can become prominent in the public sphere.

No country for old experts?

With his widely reported (and in many cases contested) statement that the general mood of the populous had turned against experts, Conservative politician Michael Gove (2016) tapped into a longstanding and particularly English stereotypical suspicion of intellectuals (Tarlow and Nilsson Stutz 2013: 3-4). In the case of archaeological experts, however, this broad cultural generalisation contrasts strongly with a high degree of support amongst the public for the discipline (Tarlow and Nilsson Stutz 2013: 2-3), albeit based on a somewhat romanticised image of the practice of archaeology typically evoked in the wake of a newsworthy discovery (Schlanger 2013: 58). This support is partly a consequence of previous and ongoing efforts in the sphere of public archaeology; from meetings and published proceedings of gentlemen's archaeological societies in the 19th century to the successful radio and television archaeologists of the 20th century, such as Leonard Wooley, Mortimer Wheeler and Glyn Daniel (Perry 2017: 1-4; Moshenska 2017: 2-3). The mid-1990s saw the resoundingly popular *Time Team* bringing a multi-period focus that partly redressed the classical and prehistorical bias of earlier television archaeology (Bonacchi 2013: 118), as well as the advent of online archaeological resources and the opportunity to narrowly focus on audiences for particular specialities and/or periods. Today, archaeology is widespread across digital and other media, both factual and fictional (Clack and Brittain 2006). For medievalists, Cohen (2010: 31-41) has documented the evolution of this digital adoption, chronicling the websites, electronic mailing lists, forums and blogs that have proliferated online. Coupled with the rise of social media engagement it is now a commonplace for archaeologists to write

about and reach audiences through these digital media (Perry and Beale 2015). However, as Caraher (2008) notes, despite being early and successful adopters of the instant publication model afforded by blogging, archaeologists have yet to fully embrace such outlets for the publications of the site reports, data and research on which the discipline is founded. In this respect it appears there is still a hierarchical distinction between the dissemination of popular and 'serious' academic archaeology. An illustrative example can be seen in Rocks-Macqueen and Webster's (2014) publication of conference papers on the subject of archaeological blogging in a pdf 'electronic-book' format, rather than directly via the blog format discussed and frequently championed therein.



Figure 1: A selection of popular culture non-archaeological Viking content (Fine Wood Working 2012; History n.d.; Imgur 2017; Lewis 2016; Valve Corporation 2017)

Taken at face value it would appear that the dissemination of popularised archaeology to the public has (thus far) adapted successfully to a changing contemporary media landscape, but previous research into the relationship between archaeology and the public has often focussed only on the core audience (Piccini and Henson 2006; Bonacchi 2013). Similarly, it is perhaps unsurprising when Bonacchi (2017: 65) notes that 80% of users who had 'liked' a museum, gallery and heritage Facebook page were generally supportive towards heritage and archaeology. Yet, of course, this does not tackle the vastly greater number of people who are not invested in heritage and archaeology in a conscious or active matter. This is complicated further by the proliferation of poorly fact-checked and misattributed historical and archaeological information online ('fake news'), some of it not easily distinguished from authoritative sources (Werner 2014). This is certainly applicable to early medieval archaeological information online, exemplified by numerous Facebook pages dedicated to Viking

themes, wherein a mixture of ill-defined folkloric, fantastical and racial ideas frequently drowns out factual and archaeologically informed content (e.g. Proud Viking, n.d.) (Figure 1).

Even the most popular of these unreliable sources are dwarfed by the followings for the History Channel's *Vikings* television drama (History, n.d.) and the widespread repurposing of the term as a brand-name (notably a US football team, kitchen fitting supplier and river cruise operator); the audience for Facebook pages with specifically factual Viking content is substantially lower. The same pattern holds true for Facebook pages relating to Saxons and Picts with the notable exception of pottery specialist Paul Blinkhorn's page, benefitting from the celebrity status afforded by his *Time Team* appearances; additionally Pict is conflated with the abbreviation of 'picture', with the result that collections of themed photographs make up the most popular pages (see Tables 1-3).

Consequently it would appear that gauging the public's self-professed interests may provide only limited distinction between their engagement with robust evidential information and heritage manifestations of the zeitgeist media malaise: 'fake news' (Quin 2017). Therefore, in this chapter the social media engagements of a broader corpus beyond history and archaeology enthusiasts is examined, one in which it is recognised that some individuals' interactions with early medieval archaeology may be only fleeting rather than a sustained interest (Sánchez 2013: 7) and for whom the importance of the authenticity of the information encountered is unknown.

Medieval virality

In order to understand how early medieval archaeology is successfully transmitted across these wider audiences this study does not focus on the core audiences aligned to blogs or Facebook pages, but on the most globally viral social media posts relating to each of three terms – 'Viking', 'Saxon', 'Pict'. The terms were selected as representing one popular, one familiar, and one comparatively obscure aspect of the early Middle Ages as evidenced by a search showing the prevalence of each of the three terms in the Google Ngram corpus of over 8 million books (Lin *et al.* 2012). Goel *et al.* (2015: 1) define virality as the measure of peer-to-peer diffusion (via shares/reposts) of online content across social networks; the data for this investigation was provided by querying the virality-tracking website *Buzzsumo* with each of the terms and recording the twenty most viral posts of 2017 for each (*Buzzsumo* n.d.). This information was tabulated and each post assessed for its direct basis in authoritative archaeological content rather than popular culture, for example, reports of discoveries of material culture and/or new academic research rather than a historically based television show (Tables 4–6).

Vikings generated the most shares, with 7,000,000 shares in total for Viking versus 450,000 for Saxon and only 15,000 for Pict (see Figure 2). However, the data also shows that of the 20 most shared Viking stories 17 were directly based on archaeological research; Saxons and Picts generated far less sharing of stories and also saw a significant drop in the proportion of archaeological stories in the top 20 for each (see Figure 3).

Whilst the statistical limitations of such a small survey are accepted, it appears that there may be a correlation between the prevalence of a particular medieval theme in popular culture, and the degree to which the public prioritize an expert archaeological source in the stories they share about that aspect of the past. Possibly, such an interpretation conflates virality with popularity however; a social media share need not signify support or endorsement of the content being shared (Sánchez 2013: 7). Indeed, Guerini and Staiano (2015: 2) offer evidence suggesting a more complex pattern of behaviour where virality is linked to a range of emotional responses to the original post, with anger being a notable component of the likelihood to share news. Archaeological ideas that have challenged preconceptions or prejudices, such as ethnic diversity in Roman Britain (Beard 2017) and the recent DNA-based reconstruction of Cheddar Man (Brace *et al.* 2019), have provoked anger in some quarters,

resulting in heated and extended online interactions which may have further fuelled their perceived viral ‘popularity’. Further, given the suggestion of a link between emotional arousal and propensity to sharing (Guerini and Staiano 2015: 4), it may be that some of the Vikings’ huge social reach compared to Saxons and Picts could be attributed to the very emotionally affective hypermasculine stereotype of killing, raping and pillaging, amplified by a contemporary cultural appetite for equally powerful female historical figures (Trafford 2019).

Shield-maidens and sharing

To investigate what may be driving these shares a case study of the most widely shared Viking story of 2017 is considered. Published as an open access paper in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, ‘A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics’ focussed on DNA testing of human remains from a previously excavated warrior/weapons burial, Bj581, in the Viking Age settlement of Birka, Sweden (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017). The results, indicating that the individual was a female, overturned a biological sex interpretation that had stood since the original late 19th-century excavation (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017); the suggestion of a female Viking warrior may represent a ‘perfect storm’ of emotional arousal in terms of both subject matter and the challenging of preconceptions, fuelling dramatic headlines in print and online media (Williams 2017a).

Williams (2017a) has documented the diverse narratives that have been attached to the story in media outlets, and similar repurposing can be seen in a sampling of the social media shares; *Vikings* actor Katheryn Winnick light-heartedly asserts the historic validity of her character Lagertha (Winnick 2017); the Facebook page for Medievalists.net (2017) highlights the academic debate surrounding the research; Norse Mythology (2017) presents evidence for Viking gender fluidity (to a mainly outraged reception). This repurposing of the Birka burial story is in part a consequence of the media strategy pursued by the authors; in early commentaries upon the paper Williams (2017b) and Jesch (2017) both note that the researchers selected an open access journal to maximise the sharing and discussion of their paper, but then used media requests for rebuttal to direct their critics to pursue the debate only through the peer reviewed format (Anderson 2017). Subsequently, lead author Hedenstierna-Jonson has continued this process of rebuttal rather than direct debate via a variety of print, radio, online video and podcast interviews; expressing frustration at criticism of their methodology and inviting academics to instead dispute the interpretation (Futureproof 2017; Price 2017; Saga Thing 2017; Stockholm University 2017; Svanlid 2017; Sveriges Radio 2017). This process has reached a final-word of sorts with the publication of a peer-reviewed follow-up paper (Price *et al.* 2019) reasserting the validity of the methodology used to derive DNA from grave Bj.581, and addressing criticisms of the interpretation from the earlier work by presenting a spectrum of more nuanced ideas of mortuary identity. In closing the authors note that ‘this is a case study that, in some ways, presents more questions than answers ... It is now for others to decide how they deal with the wider implications’ (Price *et al.* 2019: 194), reiterating a preference to delimit their own involvement in the ongoing wider debates sparked by their publications.

Bonacchi (2017: 66) has previously noted that despite the possibilities for direct and immediate interaction inherent in blogs and social platforms the archaeological discipline still largely utilizes online media to maintain a top-down broadcast model of dissemination. While the scale of the social media response is doubtless the major obstacle to direct debate nonetheless both the paper’s lead author and one of its most quoted critics have both indicated a reluctance to engage with responses on this medium (Jesch 2017; Saga Thing, 2017). Svanberg (2013: 67) has characterised archaeologists taking such a stance as betraying intellectual snobbery towards debates in the public sphere, preferring to ‘lock themselves up in well-defended towers of academia’.

Table 1: Facebook Pages with highest followings by keyword at end of 2017: keyword: Viking (Buzzsumo 2017a)

Ranking	Facebook Page name	Page followers	Focus	Archaeological research
1	Vikings	5.1m	History channel TV drama	No
2	Minnesota Vikings	2.1m	Sports team	No
3	Viking River Cruises	833K	Tour operator	No
4	Viking	689K	Kitchen fittings supplier	No
5	Vikings da Depressão	357K	History channel TV drama	No
6	The Viking Warriors-Folk/Viking/Celtic/Pagan Metal	285K	Viking-centric pop culture	No
7	Minnesota Vikings on 247Sports	259K	Sports team	No
8	Vikings Fans	222K	History channel TV drama	No
9	Vikings Fans Official	217K	History channel TV drama	No
10	Proud Viking	212K	Viking-centric pop culture	No

Note: the most followed Viking keyword Page focussed on archaeological/ heritage content is JORVIK Viking Centre with 17K followers

Table 2: Facebook Pages with highest followings by keyword at end of 2017: keyword: Saxon (Buzzsumo 2017b)

Ranking	Facebook Page name	Page followers	Focus	Archaeological research
1	Saxon (Official)	512K	Musicians	No
2	Manser Saxon Contracting	18K	Construction industry training	No
3	Saxon Club	16K	Nightclub	No
4	The Saxon Pub	16K	Public house	No
5	Paul Blinkhorn - Anglo-Saxon & Medieval Pottery Specialist	15K	Archaeologist	Yes
6	Saxon Andrew's Universe	13K	Sci-fi author	No
7	Saxon Hotel Villas & Spa	12K	Hotel	No
8	Saxon + Parole	8.9K	Restaurant	No
9	Saxon Sound System	8.7K	Musicians	No
10	Saxons Energy Services	7.8K	Petroleum company	No

Note: the most followed Saxon keyword Page focussed on archaeological/ heritage content is Paul Blinkhorn - Anglo-Saxon & Medieval Pottery Specialist (see above) with 15K followers.

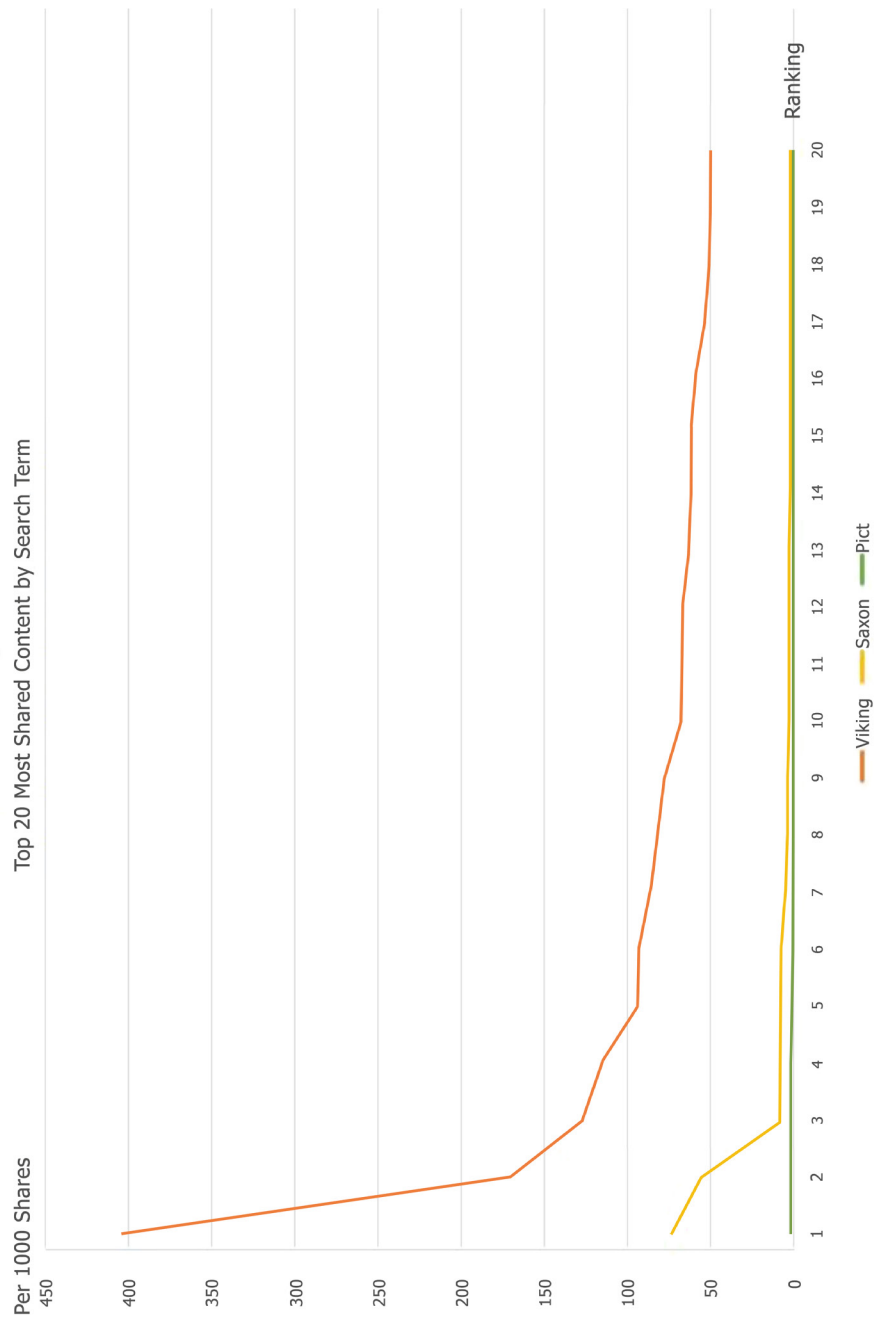


Figure 2: Total number of shares for the 20 highest ranked viral posts of 2017, compared by keyword: Viking/Saxon/Pict (Source: Tables 4-6)

Table 3: Facebook Pages with highest followings by keyword at end of 2017: keyword: Pict (Buzzsumo 2017c)

Ranking	Facebook Page name	Page followers	Focus	Archaeological research
1	Pict Oriente	70K	Instagram model	No
2	Pict Alto Astral	41K	Instagram model	No
3	Pict Pump	29K	Instagram model	No
4	Pict Nebraska	27K	Instagram model	No
5	Pict Miau	25K	Instagram model	No
6	PICT XO Love	19K	Instagram model	No
7	Gudang Gamis Real Pict	14K	Clothing brand	No
8	Pict Nárnia	13K	Instagram model	No
9	Pict Talibã	13K	Instagram model	No
10	PICT Máfia	12K	Instagram model	No

Note: the most followed Pict keyword Page focussed on archaeological/ heritage content is The Pictish Arts Society with 5K followers.

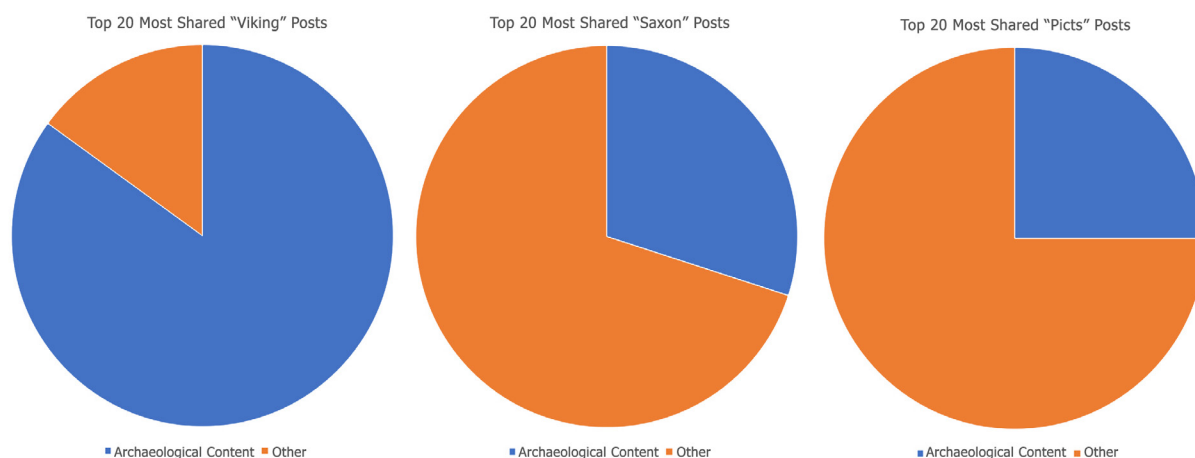


Figure 3: Archaeological vs other content in the top 20 viral posts of 2017, compared by keyword: Viking/Saxon/ Pict. Blue indicates archaeological content, orange indicates other (Source: Tables 4-6)

Table 4: The most shared content by keyword during 2017 across Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn social media platforms Keyword: Viking. Total shares Dec 2016 to Dec 2017: 7,011,000

Ranking	Content	Shares	Archaeological research
1	Viking skeleton's DNA test proves historians wrong	404K	Yes
2	What Kind Of Viking Would You Have Been?	171K	No
3	Medieval Scandinavian architecture: Viking longhouses, the ring fortress, ritual buildings & boathouses	127K	Yes
4	Iconic Viking warrior was a woman, DNA test confirms	115K	Yes
5	DNA confirms Viking remains belonged to a female military leader	94K	Yes
6	Epic Photos From Viking Festival In Scotland	93K	No
7	Why did Vikings have 'Allah' embroidered into funeral clothes?	87K	Yes
8	1,200-Year-Old Viking Sword Discovered On Norwegian Mountain	82K	Yes
9	Hunters find Viking sword in Norwegian mountains but no bones or other artifacts	78K	Yes
10	Genetic Evidence Reveals Buried Viking Warrior Was Actually A Woman	68K	Yes
11	Norway's Saint Olaf Uncovered: Archaeologists Believe They have Discovered the Shrine of the Lost Viking King	67K	Yes
12	Viking warrior discovered in Sweden was a woman, researchers confirm	67K	Yes
13	The Hiddensee treasure: The largest discovery of Viking jewellery in Germany	64K	Yes
14	Incredible Viking Ring Fortress Discovered In Denmark	62K	Yes
15	The Lofotr Viking Museum in Norway features the largest Viking building ever found in Scandinavia	62K	Yes
16	A Viking boat grave discovered under a market square in Norwegian city of Trondheim	59K	Yes
17	Viking warrior found in Sweden was a woman, researchers confirm	54K	Yes
18	DNA proves fearsome Viking warrior was a woman	51K	Yes
19	Archaeologists in N. Iceland discover Viking age chief buried in ship with his sword and dog	50K	Yes
20	Polish Viking trying to look like a 70-year-old man in peak condition	50K	No

Table 5: The most shared content by keyword during 2017 across Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn social media platforms. Keyword: Saxon. Total shares Dec 2016 to Dec 2017: 491,000

Ranking	Content	Shares	Archaeological research
1	The Alfred Jewel: One of the most famous and mysterious treasures from Anglo-Saxon England	73K	Yes
2	How to Knit the Celtic Cable Saxon Braid Stitch Pattern	56K	No
3	Saxon - Thunderbolt (Official Video)	8K	No
4	USS George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group Completes Saxon Warrior	8K	No
5	This Anglo-Saxon Version of “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” Might Be More Epic Than Beowulf	8K	No
6	WATCH: Exclusive video of Saxon’s new single ‘Thunderbolt’	7K	No
7	Coins discovery ‘will re-write’ Anglo-Saxon history	5K	Yes
8	Archaeologists discover mound next to Slough car park is ‘prestigious’ Anglo-Saxon monument	4K	Yes
9	Saxon: Decade Of The Eagle	4K	No
10	‘Highly important’ Anglo-Saxon village remains discovered in Cambridge	3K	Yes
11	John Saxon Wrote an INSANE ‘Elm Street’ Prequel Back in 1987 - Bloody Disgusting	3K	No
12	Saint Edmund, the Saxon king, may be buried under town’s tennis courts, experts believe	3K	Yes
13	Steelers RB coach James Saxon: DeAngelo Williams could help somebody	3K	No
14	Actor John Saxon honored with film festival	2K	No
15	After Trump and Brexit, is this the end for the Anglo-Saxon west?	2K	No
16	UFO And SAXON To Return To North America In The Fall	2K	No
17	Marine Le Pen claims ‘Anglo Saxon world waking up’ as Europe’s far-right parties meet after Trump inauguration	2K	No
18	Saxon - An Animated Miniseries	2K	No
19	Biff Byford of Saxon - People Respect Us Because We are Still Making Great Metal Albums!	2K	No
20	Anglo-Saxon settlement found at wind farm cable site	2K	Yes

By contrast when the second-most shared Viking story (the recovery of a 9th-century sword from a glacier) was seized upon by climate change deniers, the archaeologists involved issued a blog post directly addressing the frequent misunderstandings and misuse of their project results (Pilø 2018). Renshaw (2013: 47) believes that challenging misuse serves a positive purpose, noting that ‘the archaeologist can advance the public’s deliberation of an issue, even if this occurs by ... (the public) contesting, or ultimately refuting, the archaeologist’s intellectual contribution’. In so doing researchers can establish a dialogue about their results, an opportunity afforded by online publishing that Larsson (2013: 34)

sees as essential in growing networks for further dissemination. Brophy (2018: 1656) considers that it is incumbent upon the archaeologist not only to participate in such online debates but to actively deny the misuse and appropriation of their research by groups with extremist agendas, through robust engagement in digital public spaces. This is particularly important when, regardless of the endorsement or rejection of the archaeologist's interpretation, it is frequently such authoritative research that the public share, engage with and debate.

Table 6: The most shared content by keyword during 2017 across Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn social media platforms. Keyword: Pict. Total shares Dec 2016 to Dec 2017: 15,445

Ranking	Content	Shares	Archaeological research
1	Brutally murdered 1,400 year-old Pict has face recreated	2K	Yes
2	Ancient Pict's face reconstructed	2K	Yes
3	Scots experts reconstruct face of murdered Pictish man	1.7K	Yes
4	Ancient Pict facial reconstruction created from one of Scotland's earliest	1.6K	Yes
5	Beyhadh's Saanjh AKA Aneri Vajani Gets Trolled For Posting Her Pict...	871	No
6	Estée Lauder's new shareholder report actually includes shoppable pict	598	No
7	Moray dig unearths Pict secrets including 1110-year-old coin	362	Yes
8	PICT goes Wilde with three-part program at The Frick	345	No
9	Oscar Watch: More Than Half the Country Hasn't Seen Any 2017 Best Pict	284	No
10	Oscar Watch: More Than Half the Country Hasn't Seen Any 2017 Best Pict	211	No
11	PICT Classic Theatre Sets ROMEO AND JULIET in 1930s Little Italy	151	No
12	ADRIANNE KNAPP - Actor, PICT Classic Theatre - 'Burgh Vivant	147	No
13	Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict	125	No
14	Romeo and Juliet at PICT Classic Theatre	120	No
15	La La Land director Damien Chazelle's Calgary grandparents call Oscars Best Pict	91	No
16	TEDx PICT 2017: Life in Technicolor to Splash Colors on 30th Sept	74	No
17	Pict Classic Theatre puts fresh spin on Greek tragedy	72	No
18	Oedipus Rex PICT Pittsburgh's Classic Theatre	69	No
19	PISB Credenz 2017 To Be Held From 15th - 17th September in PICT Pune	66	No
20	PICT stages 'Oedipus Rex' with clarity and zest	63	No

Conclusion

It appears that individual viral news stories are the most effective way of reaching a large social media audience with archaeological research, rather than writing for a core audience; emotionally provoking stories that challenge assumptions are notably effective at driving sharing behaviours, particularly where the focus aligns with popularised subject matter of the period. One caveat however is that this engagement is in part controlled by algorithms that limit users' interactions and exposure to individual stories (Bolland 2014). Following widespread criticism that Facebook has inadvertently promoted divisiveness the company intends to reduce the social reach of intentionally contentious material (Thompson and Vogelstein 2018); how and to what extent this will impact dissemination of challenging archaeological content remains to be seen. A further caveat to the work presented here is that terms of enquiry less focussed on identity might yield results less driven by emotional arousal, such an expansion of this work also providing an opportunity to query an increased quantity and wider variety of early medieval search terms; however such further comparative investigations lie outside the scope of this chapter.

The early medieval period, with its sparsely recorded history and richly ambiguous mixture of seemingly familiar concepts, myths and characters (Marzinzik 2011: 1039), continues to provide particularly fertile ground for the creation of foundation myths for groups and beliefs (Maldonado 2017). Recognising that no publication, however carefully worded, can guard against criticism in all the settings and agendas that archaeological research can be bent to, Steel (2011) sees an existential choice: to publish online openly and widely, accepting the exposure of one's ideas to critiques from academics and the public, or to avoid such exposure and exist only within academia. Cohen (2010, 29) suggests that the existing model of publication, with the academic's paper or monograph representing the culmination of their work upon a subject, is increasingly out of step with contemporary forms of dissemination. Priego (2012 para. 14) recognizes that 'anxieties about authority, control, attribution, originality and privacy are likely to haunt the theory and practice of scholarly social media use for some time' but posits that nonetheless an open willingness to engage via social media and blogs is a necessary and complementary avenue to traditional academic activity. It may be increasingly incumbent upon early medievalists to follow their publications out into the wider online world; to understand the uses and contest the misuses of their work, and in so doing provoke elements of the wider public into joining them in a critical reflection upon the period.

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Old Norse in the Wild West: Digital Public Engagement on YouTube

An interview with Jackson Crawford

Conducted via Skype, 16 July 2019, and subsequently edited and augmented, Howard Williams (HW) interviewed Old Norse specialist Dr Jackson Crawford (JC) regarding the rationale and context of his YouTube channel focusing on the Norse languages, myths and sagas.

Introduction

HW: Across the humanities, the character and extent of our digital engagement is a topic of hot debate, including questions regarding whether academics should, and how they should, operate as public intellectuals. How much should we ‘dilute’ or ‘dumb-down’ our research in order to reach broad audiences? Or is the skill of synthesising academic debates and ideas for public engagement a craft in itself that is distinct from simplifying our scholarship beyond recognition? Either way, being public educators and communicators requires far greater recognition by academic, governmental, commercial and other employers and greater credit and support is required for it to flourish in the future, rather than being seen as a personal ‘perk’ for those that find themselves successful at it.

In this context, professional and academic early medieval archaeologists have been active in multiple forms of media engagement for over half a century. In the digital age, some early medieval archaeologists are very active on social media, speaking to other experts and specialists but also wide audiences they would not reach via other media. Yet there has emerged demonstrable yawning gaps in digital engagement. Notably, few early medieval archaeologists have yet exploited the educational potential of YouTube and (at the time of writing) there are no YouTube channels dedicated to early medieval (including Anglo-Saxon and Viking) archaeology. This is despite the widespread and versatile use of filmmaking by archaeologists and others over many decades in expository dissemination, now often via social media, and the specific use of YouTube by archaeologists exploring other periods and themes (e.g. Morgan 2014). Allowing video content to be uploaded and freely shared to potentially global audiences has been exploited by only a handful of early medieval archaeological fieldwork projects (e.g. Tong *et al.* 2015). While Marc Barkman-Astles’ well-established *Archaeosoup* channel regularly touches on themes connected to early medieval archaeology and its reception in popular culture (notable examples include his critique of the television drama set in the 9th century: *The Last Kingdom*¹ and his interview with Dr David Petts (Durham University) about his work with DigVentures investigating the Anglo-Saxon monastery of Lindisfarne (see for context, Barkman-Astles 2019)² his channel is not primarily about early medieval archaeology. Likewise, a second example is the recent YouTube channel *Archaeoduck*, the initiative of archaeological material specialist Chloë Duckworth (2019), which features aspects of her specialism in glass from Late Antiquity/the Early Middle Ages glass but its focus lies on addressing introductory themes and subjects relevant across periods and places and focusing on the practice of archaeology.³ A last example is *Recording Archaeology* by Doug Rocks-McQueen which features videoed conference presentations and thus inevitably includes content about early medieval archaeology, but does not do so primarily or exclusively. In summary, none of these YouTubers dedicate themselves to regularly and specifically tackling early medieval archaeological discoveries and debates.⁴ One exception

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9GUwkOimt8&t=505s>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4rxJRpz9MU>, see also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDNnlsSNkY>.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCew8zzxGW5dnTgPCWxvqzg>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC08QKQO1qs6OPQs9l1kMQPg>

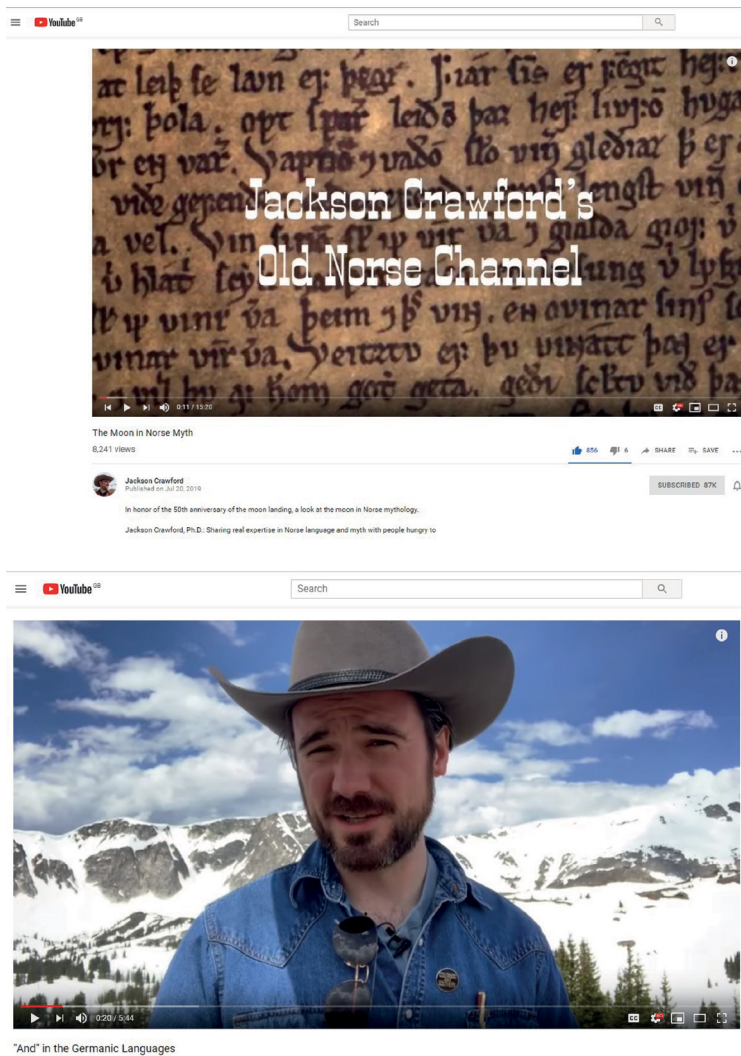


Figure 1: Screen captures from the videos (above) 'The Moon in Norse myth' showing the introduction title for the YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7K16KaktVwY&t=4s>) and (below) "And" in the Germanic languages' illustrating a typical video's presentation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkFx-JAucJwY&t=108s>), both uploaded by Jackson Crawford

choices regarding subjects, style and content, and the broader contemporary cultural, political and religious contexts in which the study of the Early Middle Ages, and the 'Vikings' in particular, are repeatedly embroiled in. I was also interested in how archaeological research, while not his primary specialism, featured in Dr Crawford's videos, and his use of the natural beauty of the Rocky Mountains as both a beautiful backdrop and an environment through which to explore themes linked to the study of Old Norse societies.

I'm aware of is the British Museum's Curator's Corner YouTube by videos in which Dr Sue Brunning discusses early Anglo-Saxon swords, in which she explains key details about the artefact, its context of discovery, and its wider social and martial significance.⁵

In this context, the question is: what is the potential, and what are the principal challenges, of working with YouTube to tackle early medieval archaeological subjects? Since no early medieval archaeologists have (to date) created regular, detailed, informed and entertaining content to convey academic research to a broad audience, the successful, regular and information-rich YouTube channel of Old Norse specialist Dr Jackson Crawford points the way towards the importance and potential of this media for public engagement and education in the Early Middle Ages (Figure 1). Not only is his channel directly pertinent to archaeological themes and audiences, he regularly touches on archaeological evidence. Moreover, his approach may provide one model which archaeologists might wish to adapt (see also Morgan 2014).

I interviewed Dr Crawford via Skype on 16 July 2019, discussing his role as YouTube's most prominent academic voice on subjects of Old Norse language, myths and sagas, seeking to identify the origins and development of his YouTube channel (Crawford 2016–). We explored the channel's benefits and difficulties as a medium, Dr Crawford's

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIFpeBwfvbc&t=493s>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb9vTu73xmE>

The origins and development of an Old Norse channel on YouTube

HW: How did you develop your research interests and profile in Norse language and literature?

JC: I'm a linguist by training; my Masters was in linguistics from the University of Georgia, and then in my PhD I dealt with questions of historical semantics in Old Norse at the University of Wisconsin (Crawford 2014). My familiarity with the literature and mythology, of course, derives from this expertise with the language, but also from the demands for teaching the subject. This is because, if you are an Old Norse specialist, you will be required to teach Old Norse literature as that brings in the crowds while historical linguistics most certainly does not. So my range of teaching expertise in Old Norse literature derives from my historical linguistics background and that creates the context for my YouTube Channel.

HW: What particularly inspired you to deploy YouTube?

JC: I had experimented with Wordpress when I was in grad school but that was never serious: I created an adaptation of Star Wars as a Norse Saga (Crawford 2010). This wasn't really a precursor for the YouTube project, however, as it had a very different intent and was a very private project that just happened to get considerable attention. I anticipated the audience would be in single figures but it became extremely popular. It reached 10,000 viewers per day for a brief spell when it got on Reddit for a while. Since then it's not been read much, but the Internet 'remembers' it fairly well: it even has a TV Tropes page!

While I had been active on social media, the YouTube project had no precedent for me. It started when I was teaching at the University of California Berkeley, 2015–2017. I had been struggling financially and trying out all manner of second jobs. I thought that given how popular Norse subjects are, there must be a way I could tap into that and use my expertise to reach an audience and just maybe get financial remuneration for doing that. At that point I'd translated the *Poetic Edda* (Crawford 2015) and my *Saga of the Volsungs* (Crawford 2017) was on the way. I remembered reading somewhere that people more readily reach for video for their information, but also that they trust the information they receive via video more than other media. So, I thought it worth a try. Initially, my videos were done in my office at Berkeley (Figure 2), but when I came home I would make videos from wild and remote parts of Colorado and Wyoming. This is my home territory: for instance, right now, I'm talking to you from what is supposedly the most remote place in the 48 states. The internet connection isn't always great. It's a part of the world people don't visit or else they know it only from movies. While these landscapes have nothing directly to do with Old Norse, they became part of my brand.

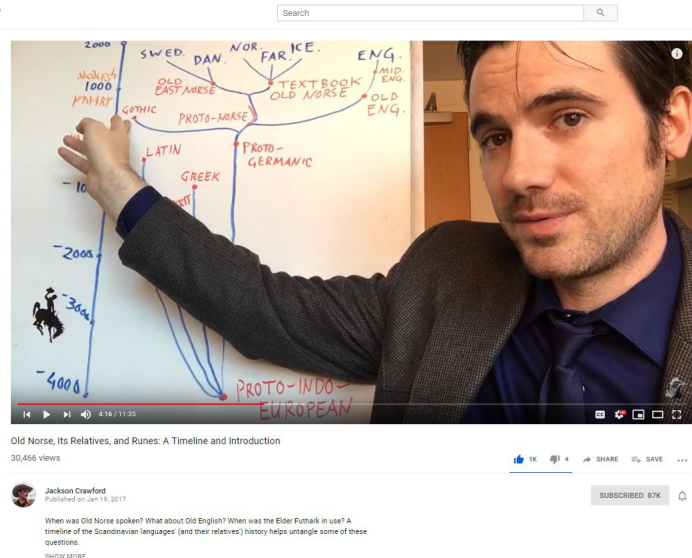


Figure 2: Screen capture from the video ‘Old Norse, Its Relatives, and Runes: A Timeline and Introduction’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6UbGLC7YWk&t=262s>), illustrating the early videos using an academic office as context, uploaded by Jackson Crawford

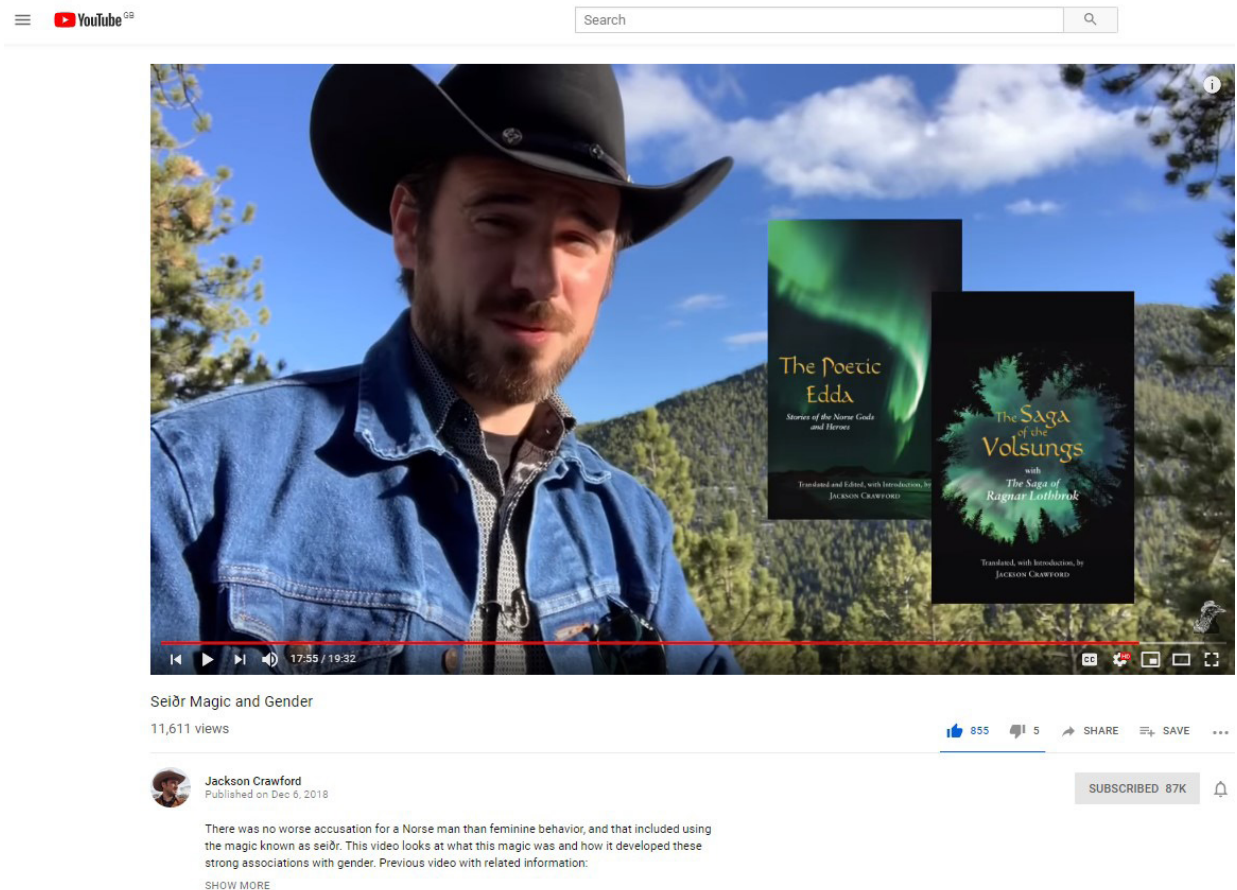


Figure 3: Screen capture from the video ‘Seiðr Magic and Gender’ illustrating how the YouTube channel creates links to Dr Crawford’s published works (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZFkPaoafBo&t=1049s>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

So, for me, the YouTube Channel served a mixed series of purposes.⁶ First, it provided income, both through Patreon and by fostering interest in my books (Figure 3). Second we’re at the tail-end of using libraries as a primary source of information, and now people are looking at Google for quick answers. Especially, people under 30 years of age will Google for answers and I run into this with students all the time. So I thought: how can I meet this demand halfway? How can I bring information not available online to people who only look online. Moreover, how can I use a format they will engage with? You can look for (by way of example) the Younger Futhark on Wikipedia but you will get the same information you get from any other open-access source online. Instead, my aim is to bring information and ideas that are not already available. The problem with Wikipedia as I see it is that it increases the currency of out-dated information by citing only public domain work that tend to be old and not necessarily reliable. For example, the Norse translations cited on Wikipedia tend to be 19th-century or very early 20th century. In other cases, the sources are simply misattributed.

HW: So, in this endeavour, you retain authorship and control of the quality and character, rather than opening it up as a ‘wiki’: is it important that your voice and work can be recognised?

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_llsyhMHCQ&list=LLRD7gIrwOmLN_D4_0RbLtSA&index=25



Figure 4: Screen capture from the video ‘The Viking Funeral Ibn Fadlan Saw’ showing how published works by others are cited (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-74nZZkAaY&t=64s>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

JC: This is what I wanted. With books you acknowledge your mistakes in your Foreword, but on Wikipedia there is no reference. In the hard sciences and in history there may be pretty good people working on there, but large tracts for my field are poorly represented. Even a large chunk of the Wikipedia page about me is inaccurate and Wikipedia gets readily used to plagiarise in various fashions by students. Instead, I have created a free resource that bypasses these difficulties and if there are problems, I alone am responsible and can rectify them by remaking videos I don’t like or become dated.

HW: It sounds as if you were thinking about audiences outside of academia from the outset, but perhaps also simultaneously you were thinking of ways to help students too?

JC: I definitely was, although I don’t actually tell my students about my videos and I prefer that. Most of them don’t know about them, although some inevitably find out. This is because I’m very wary of being accused of self-promotion within the University. But for those who want to learn, I’ve tried to include links at the end of each video recommending where to find out further information: a readers’ corner. This is a good new direction I’ve taken and part of that is in response to my colleague Dr Matthis Nordvig, who also now has a YouTube presence,⁷ who realised that students were starting to cite my videos. So, I decided it is important they are guided to further resources they can cite and I can incorporate these into the videos rather than the videos being an end-point (Figure 4). One thing to keep in mind, however, is that there are particular weaknesses with the YouTube format, including the fact that the

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/user/mattndk>

site will not let you link to many other external websites. This limits what I can link to, so I have to tell viewers in the video itself about useful other sources of information.

HW: How did you develop the strands and themes of your YouTube channel: was it organic or carefully planned?

JC: The very first videos I ever made were responses to the most asked questions I received and I thought this would help me get views. Early on, no one knows who you are on YouTube, so following the common questions was a good way to show up on Google. For example, I created the video ‘What did Old Norse sound like?’⁸ I’ve done multiple versions of this one, improving them each time. You see, I’m a proponent of reconstructed pronunciation and as I’ve gotten better, I get more embarrassed by the older videos and I re-make them.

If I’m working on something a lot, I’m going to make a video about it since the information is fresh in my mind. So for example, yesterday I turned in corrections of the pdf proofs for my edition of *Hávamál*, and I’m therefore recording a lot of videos on that subject right now. I’m also very responsive to student questions when making my videos. I teach huge classes of at least 150 students per semester as part of my contract. In this context, when a particular student does show enthusiasm for a specific topic, I try to teach them what they are curious about and respond to this also via my videos.

Another recent development is that I’ve created a document on my phone to keep tabs on the number of times I’m asked particular questions so that, if I’m out in the landscape, I can consult this document to get inspiration about what topics to address in my next video.

HW: So it seems the video creation is simultaneously ad hoc and planned: you systematically address issues that inspire you and in response to the interests of others: the public and students. Is there a structure to the duration and structure of the videos? Is there a pattern?

JC: There isn’t much of a pattern. Early on, I did 2–3 minutes because I already had a Twitter following. I don’t do a lot of academic tweeting. The problem is, it limits them to 2 minutes 20 second videos, which I consider just too short to satisfactorily address issues in any depth. Now, my videos probably average 10–15 minutes but there are no rules: the longest is 1hr 45 minutes. I prefer to break them up if they are long, which means I can deploy them over a longer duration so I can release videos when other work pressures affect the schedule. So now, I produce shorter videos which can constitute a series and I can publish them as a group.

To date, I’ve managed to stay ahead of deadlines and kept a systematic schedule of posting. The videos are scheduled for every Wednesday and Saturday all year around and I have kept way ahead of schedule so that when I go on holiday or when I’m busy with other work, the videos can still be posted.

Another development is that I’ve hired an assistant to handle the flow of emails and comments on the posts. Everyone is online all the time and I honestly don’t like being online perpetually. I don’t want the Internet to get in the way of my real world work and life. In this regard, I restrict my use of social media to around the middle of the day because I don’t want something I see there to set the tone for an entire day or an entire night’s sleep.

HW: Are there topics you won’t repeat for whatever reason?

JC: If I don’t understand a topic well, I’m reluctant to plan a video on it. If I try it once, I won’t do it again. I hate to rely too much on other people’s work. For example, despite demand to do so, one area I won’t go back to is the topic of the Vikings in North America. I can read the Ingstads’ account of the excavations at L’Anse

⁸ https://youtu.be/_ASsCH17cbA

aux Meadows (Ingstad 1969), for example, and I'm very familiar with the relevant saga literature, but it is a multi-strand topic and I don't feel I have a command of all its dimensions. I have made a few missteps in this area in the past, and I have misunderstood some sources. I concede, maybe I'll do a video about the Vinland sagas, but I won't do a video about the broader discussions of North America and the Vikings: it would take a whole summer to do the research and reading to comprehensively address the topic.

Another topic I refuse to address is the Kensington runestone. I don't answer this as much out of boredom: what can I say that hasn't already been said by other scholars? In fact, one of the ways that I might address such issues in future would be to get specialists onto the YouTube channel in order to address questions outside of my specialism, such as Anatoly Liberman for the Kensington runestone (for an overview, see Wallace and Fitzhugh 2000). I'm reluctant, as I said before, to be re-digesting other people's work. I don't want my YouTube channel to be a book report!

I have a lot of requests to talk about non-Norse studies, including Celtic and Anglo-Saxon literature. Now, I do have a background in this literature, particularly in Anglo-Saxon, but I feel this is outside my field of expertise and I don't feel I'm the person to be doing YouTube videos on these topics.

Having said all that, I have created videos that have overtly stepped outside of the format of discussing Old Norse language and literature, including a series about my favourite places⁹ and my Ranch Porch series (Figure 5).¹⁰ Yet this isn't inconsistent, since these videos are topics I have confidence in addressing, including my knowledge of hats! So I try to retain integrity in discussing things I feel I know something about.

HW: So you have integrity in terms of what you will cover, and the videos are a distinct product in themselves. However, have you explicitly avoided attempting to produce online classes in any fashion?

JC: People often ask me about doing online classes. My university hasn't branched into that, and I don't want to have to create structured classes. If I did, I would have to set homework too and the workload would be considerable. It would also need a lot of equipment and a platform other than YouTube linked to my university. Instead, I think about the YouTube channel as an encyclopedia: each video operating as a stand-alone entry. Early on, I did create a series of Norse lessons that were numbered 1, 2, 3 and so on, but I went back and re-did them, so that now I have videos that cover the topics but I am not

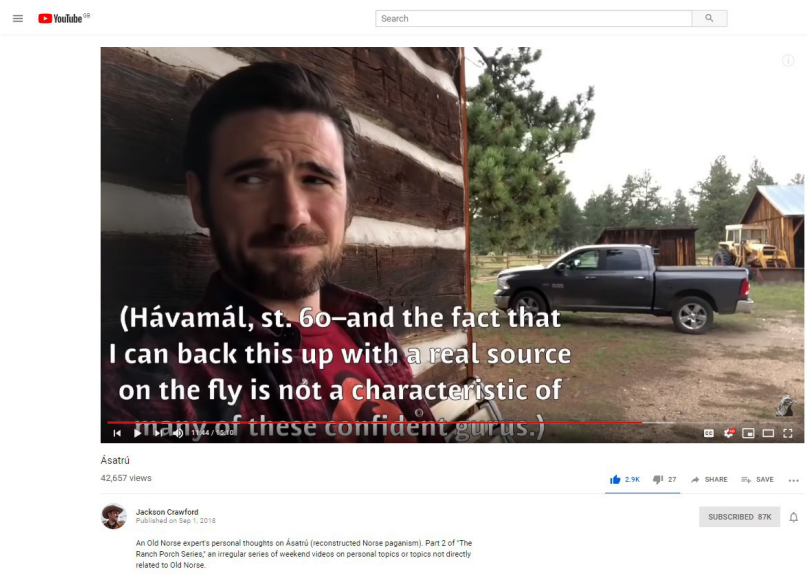


Figure 5: Screen capture from the video 'Ásatrú' in 'The Ranch Porch Series' in which Dr Crawford addresses the difficulties of interpreting Hávamál whilst explaining how others on YouTube present definitive pagan religious interpretations (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v6qTg8OAw&t=4s>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

⁹ <https://youtu.be/zIwwvsbRfF8>

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/Dn2G8ryLthw>

dictating a sequence to them. These were some of the earliest videos on the channel and had a lot of technical problems.

HW: Is that also because of the structure of YouTube: they wouldn't necessarily display them in the right sequence?

JC: Yes, I can make a playlist, but it doesn't guarantee people will view them in this way. I can put links in the top-right to another video, and that is one way to make the interconnections for related topics but there is no particular sequence, and so it is best that I make each video stand on its own merits.

HW: Regarding the longevity of the videos: I find that my blog-posts have a long shelf-life and are being consulted years after posting. I see this as a liberating and positive thing, rather than an 'immediate'. Would you agree?

JC: This is also borne out by my viewing figures too, my videos that get most views in any given month aren't the ones I'm posting. Sometimes it's very frustrating when it's my early videos from 2016/17 which aren't as good as more recent ones, and contain elements I don't agree with now. But I deal with that by re-making them, but I can never predict which videos people will want to watch, so I cannot easily anticipate which ones to remake.

This also comes up relating to publishing. When my *Poetic Edda* book was published in 2015, we have to remember it was actually written mostly in 2010–2013 and there are obviously a list of things I wish I'd done better. With the new *Hávamál* I get a chance to update my ideas.

Another way I can tell people are still watching the old videos is that I occasionally get lambasted for whatever controversy has erupted at Berkeley and I haven't been there for over 2 years!

HW: As we discussed before, having control seems really important?

JC: Yes, and videos are datable. Even if there is a delay between making and posting, I can date it and therefore it can be fairly articulated as dated to a time before subsequent events/scholarship. Occasionally I add later comments to explain/clarify on older videos saying (for example): 'When I made this video 4 months I hadn't seen a particular interpretation or heard of a particular argument'. Occasionally, I will add recommendations, I'll then added a pin comment augmenting the original list.

YouTube used to have a feature that used to help – annotations that appear as speech bubbles that allowed you to point out subsequent videos, errors or additional information. I liked this but it is gone now and so it means YouTube videos become 'fixed'.

The benefits and challenges of the YouTube channel

HW: What do you find are the benefits and challenges of being on YouTube with this channel for your career? Conversely, has there been any snobbery or negative responses from academics about this endeavour?

JC: Candidly the main pro is extra income. I've never had a tenure track position and they are hard to come by; paying my bills is a lot easier with this extra source of income!

A second positive point is that I can provide some good guidance to those that come after me, whether they are students or members of the public. I can help to shorten the path of finding basic introductory material for those new to Old Norse language and literature. It's important to remember: so often the

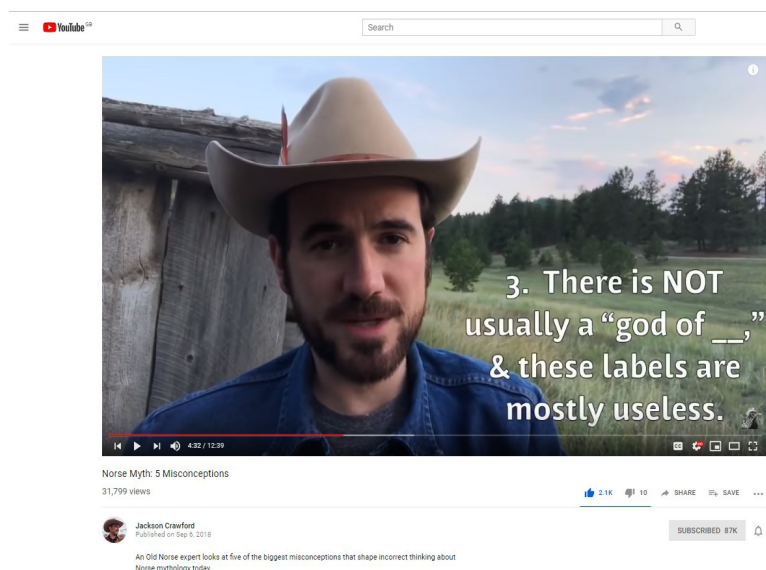


Figure 6: Screen capture from the video ‘Norse Myth: 5 Misconceptions’, an example of how the YouTube channel serves to dispell popular misunderstandings regarding Norse mythology (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnSJYDzQkE0>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

read fresh research and new translations rather than relying on out-dated older work, this will be an achievement for the YouTube channel.

In terms of cons, yes, there is some snobbery about it but I think it very much depends on where you are working. Academia is very status obsessed, and reputations matter: some will see this as not ‘serious’ research. At Berkeley where I started the YouTube channel there were people in my building who wouldn’t even talk to me, but then a few established scholars in the Department were supportive. However, at my current institution, they have looked on it very positively as educating the public in my off-time. They see it as an extension of my job and see it as a continuation of the role the Department and University fulfils as a public institution dedicated to extending academic knowledge as far as it can go.

Another ‘con’ is the notion that you have to dumb things down: a lot of academics who don’t even watch the videos presume they are dumbed down in ways that they are not. I think this prejudice towards public communication is not constructive. The public isn’t dumb, they just don’t have the technical vocabulary. I cannot take them to the top-parts of the ‘ivory tower’ without first showing them where the steps are!

Another critical point is that it might be seen as too self-promotional. But I try not to make the channel about ‘me’ but about the subject matter. Still, I often get comments/complaints from the public that I don’t look like a ‘Viking’. It drives me nuts. I don’t look at the comments anymore; people like to write them but I’ve never gotten anything constructive out of them. My assistant now moderates them. When I did look at the comments and when I was emailed direct, I would get lots of criticisms that they don’t want the academic information deriving from someone for whom it isn’t part of ‘their heritage’. This doesn’t seem to come from Scandinavia specifically, but from elsewhere. I only occasionally get comments from Scandinavians and only from a minority of those who are outside of academia and who object to me because they seem to want to get information from someone with ‘their’ (Scandinavian) heritage. In response to this, I repeatedly make clear that academics don’t have

people who have bad information simply don’t know where to go for better information, so I feel I’m doing a service to those people, whoever and wherever they are.

A third issue is that I’d like to imagine that my YouTube channel might serve as an inspiration to someone who might not come from an academic background to tackle topics that might seem inaccessible. Perhaps I might inspire somebody who might be intimidated or put off researching academic topics to give it a try.

A fourth positive is to ‘stir the pot’ of the online evidence: to try and get people to access fresh perspectives other than the same old information available on websites. As discussed above regarding Wikipedia, this is a perennial problem. So if I can get some people to move on to

to act, or dress like, their subjects. I don't need to look like a Viking; I want to look as I am and I'd like to think this might encourage some trust and long-term engagement in what I'm saying. Obviously though, some cannot look past the cowboy hat or the accent; some call the hat 'a prop' when it is simply 'me being me'.¹¹ Most people recognise this, but there will always be some that won't ever listen beyond appearances.

HW: You've said clearly in your videos that you must 'be yourself' on YouTube to retain integrity and allow the building of trust with your audience. People should get access to the subject matter without fixating on the image. But are you also reacting against other YouTubers? Are you aware of being in this broader digital environment?

JC: I have less a problem with academics, but I'm more at odds with what I call 'the gurus' on YouTube who have simple and stark answers to all manner of questions and 'sell' to their audience firm answers rather than cautious and careful scholarly inferences. Some gurus might claim to have special knowledge based on spiritual links or Nordic racial links to decipher the evidence. It's akin to claiming to know what the weather on the moon is (Figure 5).

HW: So you have that sense you are in a strange and complex digital environment. Are you aware of other Norse specialists/medieval scholars that are trying to do anything equivalent to what you are doing?

JC: The closest similar project is probably Maja Backväll's *The Rune Cast* podcast project.¹² My colleague Matthias Nordvig has also made videos as mentioned above; his focus is on the history of religions. But you need to be persistent. In the first year, no one will pay attention to you. I now worry if I don't get 1k views by noon on the day a video is released. But it took me years to get there and part of the problem is, of course, as with any career, and academic careers are no exception, there are so many things to do. Now I've persisted past this boundary. A fear of rejection by peers is another boundary that you have to push past to gain confidence in this medium of public engagement.

HW: What is the overall importance of having a YouTube presence for the discipline?

JC: If we don't do this work, the void will be filled by others who can do it and will do it with all manner of confused ideas. Some 'wannabe Viking' characters have glaringly racist agendas, while others are trying to sell various products. Their focus isn't really to explore scholarship and they know little or nothing about Old Norse research. When viewers see such characters projecting a confident attitude, and seemingly knowing what they are talking about, we see the long-term dissemination of poor or bad information. If all people find are these gurus when they go online, they will reject solid scholarship if they see it, when they see it, because they would prefer to retain those fantastical ideas sustained by these gurus' agendas. Whether anyone sees me as an authority is difficult to say, but at least I stir some fresher information into the pot and I hope I also counter misinformation as a result (Figure 6).

Audiences for the YouTube Channel

HW: Let's talk about audiences. Do you get a sense of the scale, scope and interests of your audience, whether from comments or YouTube stats? What are the key trends?

JC: The YouTube analytics give me a snapshot but it isn't that useful. I can tell you that my viewers are more male than female and the highest frequency age group are 25–34 year olds. However, I'm unclear what that tells us. One thing I want to emphasise is the significant geographical breadth of viewers. There is no concentration in the US or Europe as one might expect. Instead, a lot of views are coming

¹¹ <https://youtu.be/u1lvUFJIGN0>

¹² <http://www.runforum.nordiska.uu.se/runecast/author/maja/>

from Latin America and Asia, and this is encouraging because it is reaching people who might not have any resources to study these topics, let alone study them at local colleges or universities.

I have more of a sense of the character of my Patreon community of over one thousand supporters. Among them, are a certain amount of people interested in their Scandinavian heritage in the US, from (for example) Wisconsin and Minnesota. This reflects a broader US pattern of people interested in their Scandinavian roots. In addition, there are the hobby medievalists who mainly invest in other or broader fields, but who take an interest and read *Beowulf* or a saga, for instance. Then there are those with a broader interest in religion, mythology, history, language and have no specific investment in Norse literature and language. Next, you have modern Pagan/Heathen (Ásatrú) adherents; it is difficult to gain a sense of how many and you cannot always tell.

So my audiences seem very diverse. What's also important to emphasise, given my mention of frustrations with some comments on my appearance and accent, is that on Patreon I've only had to kick off 3 people, 2 for espousing fascist-like ideologies and one for stalking. On the whole, therefore, I feel my channel caters well to a range of audiences.

HW: Explain how Patreon works for you?

JC: Patreon supporters pledge to give you funding every month. For this, they get some added benefits. While I'm very reluctant to do translations, I will do small ones for Patreon supporters; usually I say 9 words per month. Then there's a monthly video-chat using Crowdfunder, where I talk on the video screen and my Patreon supporters make comments or pose questions and I can get them to share the screen with me. I start these sessions with a reading from a piece of Norse literature and then I add some comments on the reading, usually something linked to a recent video. Subsequently, comments and questions are posted by my Patreon supporters. These responses are always interesting and I get ideas from them for future video topics. The Patreon supporters come with good preparation. In addition to the translations and monthly chats, supporters get a Christmas card and other gifts or exclusives, such as small excerpts of text I discuss and I translate it for them, such as the scene of the *volva* in *Eiríks Saga*.

I want to emphasise that, while supporters get little perks, I sense the main thing that brings people in is the fact that they want to support my work on principle. This is such an important part of the social media economy. Likewise, I try to support via Patreon any podcasts I listen to regularly. They need my support and if I have the means I should support it. It's curiously voluntary, but a lot of people choose to do this. As I said, I have over one thousand Patreon supporters and apparently I have very high retention rather than having regular rotations of supporters. So a lot of this is just generosity and they appreciate the time and money I'm investing in making the videos.

Politics, religion and entertainment

HW: I get a sense that you don't have to pander to fictional misconceptions: you can counter misconceptions?

JC: I do make videos explicitly countering misconceptions (Figure 6).¹³ I do sometimes make people mad with my stance on particular topics! One of the benefits of me not advocating a single agenda is that you cannot predict my response on a single subject based on an ideology. This does occasionally mean I sometimes lose a supporter based on my stance. I am not much of an advocate except for looking at the sources and extrapolating from them, so it isn't much of an issue for most people. In fact, I think that in the long term, I will retain followers because I gain their trust as not a polemic voice.

¹³ https://youtu.be/o564fewG_Rw

I rarely discuss race and politics and religion. I did do a recent video making clear that I don't support ethnic nationalist ideologies and I don't want to be dragged into that.¹⁴ But even beyond talking about something like this, there are still people who simply don't like my hair, so anything can cause annoyance on YouTube!

HW: Your videos have already said what I wanted to ask about politics and religion, but I wonder whether you feel there is a demand for you to have a view on every topic?

JC: Yes: both in academia and in popular culture, and the Internet and social media have exacerbated it. People want to get information from 'their side'. This is the same for Ásatrú, and they want to find out information from 'their people'. I won't tell people how to vote, but people want to know my politics and try to guess my politics and how I'm going to vote based on the smallest subtle readings of things I might say. I've made clear I don't want to be associated with racist views but still people want to fit me into categories associated with them. However my life isn't designed for social media categorisation. That trueness to myself ultimately in the long term helps people to trust me, but inevitably it means that some people won't listen to me. Still, it's amazing what I get pushback about; in one video I mentioned the moon and some anti-moon forum had got hold of this and were denouncing me. People try to read messages into my haircut or even the colour of my shirt!

HW: You've mentioned your role as a consultant, but you've stepped away from a lot of the popular culture of the Viking Age including *Vikings* and other phenomenon.

JC: The closest I get to it is that if a movie or TV programme is coming out, I might make a video to address an issue that might come up. I'm not a big fantasy guy – the works of J.R.R. Tolkien or

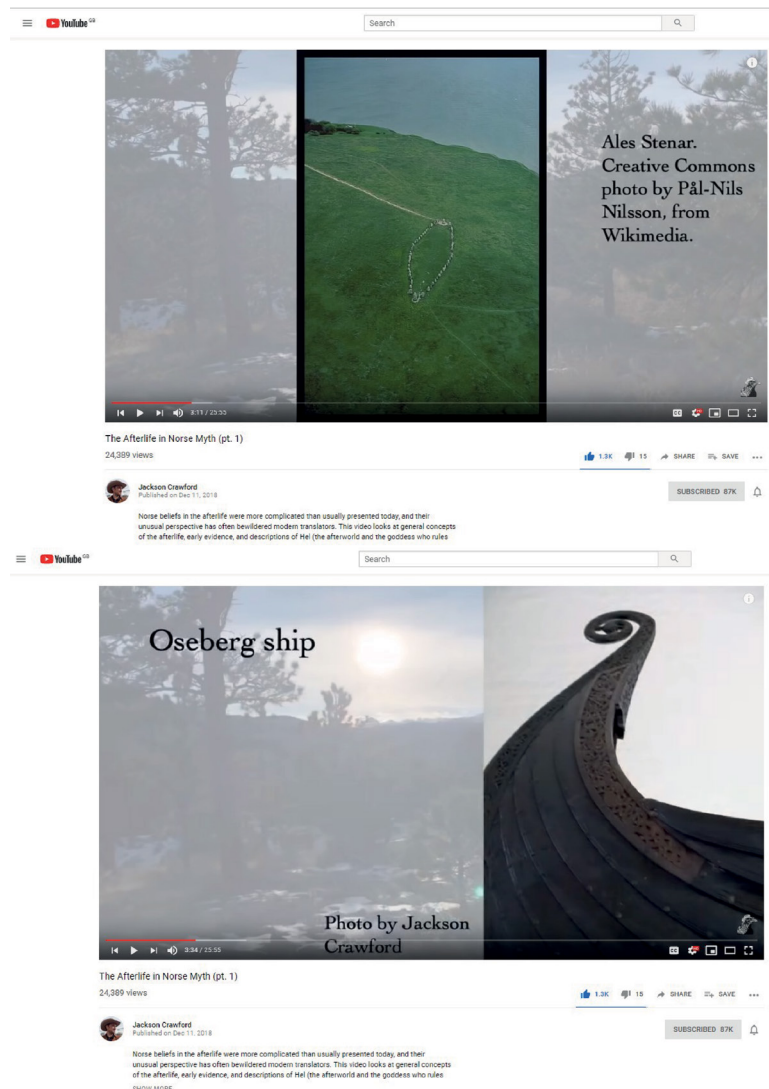


Figure 7: Screen captures from the video 'The Afterlife in Norse Myth (pt. 1)' showing the use of archaeological evidence on the YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMTE-Fza9U5s&t=234s>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

¹⁴ <https://youtu.be/-KsRe5AE7Lc>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KsRe5AE7Lc&list=LLRD7gIrwOmLN_D4_0RbLtSA&index=39&t=0s

George R.R. Martin, for example. Likewise, I've never seen *Vikings* or *Norsemen*.¹⁵ People expect me to be passionately for or against it, and my reaction is largely indifference. It's not my entertainment. Furthermore, there are plenty of people doing that and the subject bores me. Now, I do get approached to consult, but that has more to do with the fact I was at UCLA and thus the closest person to the LA studios. First of all, I worked with Disney early on in my time at UCLA when they were working on a movie that in the end never got made. As a result, I ended up consulting on *Frozen* partly for being the right specialist in the right place and time.¹⁶ One of the further advantages I think studios see in me is that I haven't been particularly star-struck when working with celebrities, allowing me to get on with the job.

My role with the TV series *American Gods* was more intricate, including lessons in pronunciation with Ian McShane.¹⁷ Right now, I have other movies and a video game project ongoing that I cannot talk about. But I would reiterate: I haven't played a video game since 2002, so it doesn't stem from what I do in my spare time, but from my expertise in Old Norse.

Another example of my connections with the entertainment industry is that I get bombarded with questions when new products are released. For example, when the *God of War* video game came out representing a Norse mythological virtual world.¹⁸ To illustrate my disconnect from their products, when a journalist sent me clips so I could review it for them, it was so different from the video games I played 20 years ago I thought they'd made a mistake and sent me a cinematic film!

Archaeology

HW: I noticed examples in your videos where you mention archaeological sites, or in the context of runes, you mention the objects and stone monuments upon which they appear (Figure 7). You make it clear you are not an archaeologist, but does your audience crave more archaeology?

JC: My audience does crave more of it and I'm the limiting factor. As I said, I don't want to discuss something if I cannot fully explain it. When I began teaching a big survey class in 2011–2012 at UCLA I had to self-educate in the archaeological sources and debates. I have some archaeological training, but in the South West USA, and there is very little carry-over. I've tried to bring more of it in, especially regarding the archaeological evidence for Norse pagan religion, which so many people are interested in. So I've tried to bring in more of the main archaeological sites that tell us about religion in the period. For example, I've tried to incorporate discussions of particular archaeological sites, such as the Swedish site of Lunda with its gold figurines (Andersson 2006; Andersson *et al.* 2004). I don't subscribe to or follow archaeological journals and welcome further thoughts on potential reading.

HW: Do you feel there's an unfair expectation for you to carry the burden of all of Viking studies on your YouTube channel?

JC: I don't want to say there is no one doing it since there may be people doing it I'm unaware of. Maja Backväll is addressing this area too very well as mentioned before. Yet there remain public misconceptions about disciplines. A friend of mine who's a palaeontologist has people approach him asking about Anasazi ruins and the same point applies for me. I try to explain through my videos that there are different disciplines involved, those approaching the past using artefacts, others using texts, and those using language reconstruction. I'm strong on the latter, and strong on the centre, but not so strong on the archaeology and artefacts. This sounds like a joke but I don't think it actually is: people evoke an Indiana Jones character for anyone who studies the past. I wonder whether my general aesthetic

¹⁵ *Vikings*: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2306299/?ref=fn_al_tt_1; *Norsemen*: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5905354/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

¹⁶ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2294629/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

¹⁷ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1898069/>

¹⁸ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5838588/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

helps them in this regard, but I'm not out there searching for the 'Ark of the Odin Covenant', fun as that might be.

A related point is the danger of making any evidence from the past part of the same story: not all archaeology is pertinent to the questions. The 'past' can readily become the same thing for the public. I'm interested in archaeology and I aim to use it. However, in terms of my expertise, I know I'm better at keeping up with language and literature discussions, even topics outside my specialism. So I can talk about the Rigveda or Hittite texts more confidently than the archaeology of Scandinavia because tackling archaeology involves navigating a different discipline. Still, when I know about archaeological evidence that has a bearing on a theme I cover, I do increasingly try to mention archaeological evidence and show them where they can find out more about it, such as the site of Ranheim, near Trondheim, Norway discovered in 2011 (Ghunfelt 2011), or the aforementioned site of Lunda. Likewise if runestones mention the names of gods, or if there are pendants that are seen as relevant to representations of gods, I can easily look stuff up or point them towards where they can get the detail.

HW: Given there are re-enactment communities and archaeologist specialists who immerse themselves in the detail, isn't it healthy that you are not trying to pretend to know the details of all the archaeological evidence. Isn't this positive?

JC: More often it disappoints people, and sometimes related to the complaint that I'm not Scandinavian is that I'm not *in* Scandinavia. I guess it might help me from being bombarded by comments from re-enactors, but instead I get bombarded by people, including pagans, who want me to comment on their religion. So most of the time I'm disappointing people, but if I dedicated the time to keep up with the archaeology, I'd lose track of the work being done in my own fields of expertise: I only have so much brain and so many hours.

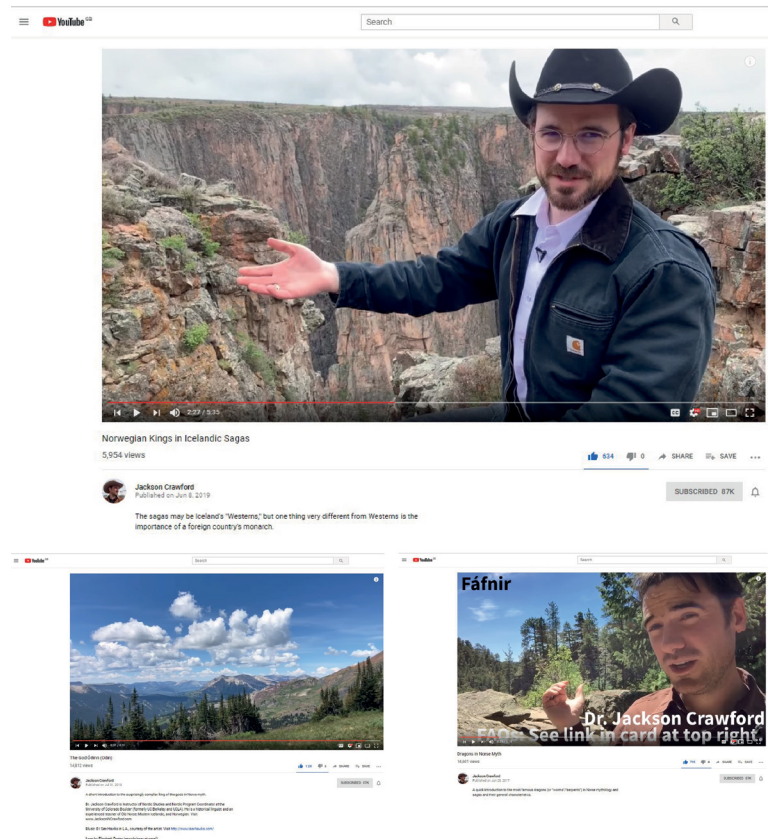


Figure 8: Three screen captures to illustrate the landscape backdrops deployed: (a: above) 'Norwegian Kings in Icelandic Sagas' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaJzXSAtxSg&t=147s>), (b: below left) 'The God Óðinn (Odin)' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b12NUPmcfw8>) and (c: below right) 'Dragons in Norse Myth' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt-mUMEwEWPI&t=25s>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

Figure 9 (next page): Three screen captures illustrating the links to other videos, thanks to Patreon supports, and logos used at the end of videos to support the YouTube Channel by artist Elizabeth Porter: (a) 'Norse Myth: 5 Misconceptions' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnSJYDzQkE0&t=105s>), (b) 'Valhalla' (Valhöll): The Afterlife, pt.2' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X_c6FCpz-KQ) and (c) 'The Moon in Norse Myth' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7K16KaktVwY&t=31s>), uploaded by Jackson Crawford

YouTube

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Norse Myth: 5 Misconceptions

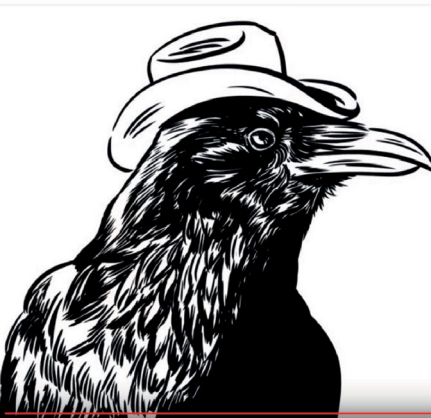
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Valkyries (Valkyrior)

Dr. Jackson Crawford University of Colorado 41:13

Lord of the Moose: Odin and the Dead

Jackson Crawford, Ph.D. University of Colorado 21:42

Valhalla (Valhöll): The Afterlife, pt. 2

9,423 views

569 3 SHARE SAVE

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1



*Thank you very much,
Patreon supporters!*

YOU are the future of education.
YOU are the reason that good
information is getting out there,
not hoarded in the Ivory Tower
or distorted by internet gurus.

I am forever grateful for your
generosity, large or small, and
for your kindness and good will.

All the best,
Jackson Crawford

The Moon in Norse Myth

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In honor of the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, a look at the moon in Norse mythology.

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Pseudoarchaeology and the news cycle

HW: This links to your earlier answer of Vikings in North America outside Newfoundland, about which there has been a long history of fantastical claims of Norse settlement, but what other pseudoarchaeologies: how do you respond to fraudulent or fantastical visions of the Early Middle Ages?

JC: Yes, I encounter it, for example there's a guy in Colorado who says he has a runic inscription in a cave and he wants to charge me to look at it. But on the whole I don't think I get bothered a lot. As I said, I get asked (as stated above) about the Kensington runestone, and even some sites from Oklahoma. But I don't get pestered about it.

Another factor here is that I don't tie my YouTube channel to the news cycle. So when there were loads of debate about Bj581 – the Birka 'female warrior' – I got a ton of questions about that (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017). My response at the time was to make a video about shield maidens in the sagas.¹⁹ I cannot comment on the grave, but I can talk about the literature. People weren't very satisfied with that response.

Another example was the meme circulating the internet stating that Sweden was going to ban runes. I won't respond if people are asking on YouTube, but even Patreon supporters were asking about it. The actual Swedish government directive related to an investigation into the far-right's use of a couple of runes, but not a 'ban' on runes. I didn't make a video responding to it, since it would only be relevant in the short-term and it will only make angry people even angrier and make them come and pester me and insult people on my site. Likewise, as I mentioned above regarding *God of War*, whatever the latest movie, television show or video game, I get questions about their accuracy and whether I like them, but I don't make videos about them.

The same applies regarding my consultant work for the entertainment industry. I can answer questions about the Norse language, but I can only direct them to which books to read to find out how their hair looked or what their houses looked like.

HW: So you distance yourself from the immediate responses to academic news of discoveries and debates as well as pseudoarchaeological controversies in the public arena?

JC: Yes. As I discussed earlier, I want people to look at the videos as encyclopaedia entries rather than something tied up with the news cycle. I want them to be useful in 10 years, if YouTube is still around. This means that some topics are simply not appropriate.

The Rocky Mountains

HW: I'm fascinated by how you deploy the landscapes and wildlife of Colorado and Wyoming in your YouTube videos (Figure 8). You've regarded it as a 'brand', but could you take me through your thinking. Is it more than an attractive setting?

JC: I grew up in the Rocky Mountains in various locations, mainly in Colorado and Wyoming, and various job changes meant I moved a lot but this remained my focus. When I did videos in the Rocky Mountains, it became clear these videos did better. It gives them something to look at instead of my office. In addition, I have a strong pride in my home and my part of the country and I like showing it off. I know various stunning locations with waterfalls and mountains, canyons and ghost towns. Moreover, wildlife regularly feature; my videos have incorporated my own footage of buffalo, mountain goats, moose, wild

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJQm4jqHbWc>

horses, and varieties of deer. One connection to Norse mythology is when ravens can be heard in the background of videos.²⁰ For example, last week I was roared at by a bear when filming but sadly right after I turned off. Another video has an avalanche in it that just happened behind me. I love it. It's a real love affair of mine with this country and I love showing it off and it's an opportunity to show people all over the world something of the landscape. The tourist boards in both states do *not* pay me to do this! I like to show them off, it's fun and it's an excuse to go places I haven't been in a while.

A week or two ago, I was camping with some family on the other side of the mountains and thinking of how to drive back, and I thought there was one road I hadn't taken in a while and I thought that maybe there would be locations where I could make some videos. Obviously the landscape isn't very similar to anything I am talking about in the sagas. But then sometimes it might be, and sometimes people have mistaken me for talking from the fjords. If you know what Norway looks like and you know the Rockies, they aren't that similar. But if people simply see mountains they assume I must be in the mountains of Scandinavia.

In the last 2 years I haven't made any indoors videos unless it is a Favourite Places video where I'm in a museum. This is part of the tradition, the brand: the fun of the videos.

HW: I was going to suggest to you, and you are welcome to rebut it, that while they are different, there is an interesting dimension in that you are *not* in Scandinavia. It gives it more, not less legitimacy, since it doesn't have a fake contrived TV feeling.

JC: I think it disappoints people more than anything, but it is part of the same point that you don't have to be a wannabe Viking to study this material. One video which gets quite a lot of hate in my Ranch Porch series where I explain I'm not pagan--this angers some pagans because they want information from 'one of them' or from 'a real Scandinavian.' I make the point that if someone from Zimbabwe wants to write a history of Colorado, it might be really good: You don't need to come from there or be in a place, but I expect she/he would have visited it. That's not saying that I shouldn't go to Scandinavia and make videos, but I haven't done that in the time I've been making the videos. The locations are sort of separate for me, it's just an extra treat on offer.

HW: But where it does intersect in your logos: you're playing on the relationship between your heritage and the landscape, and your academic research.

JC: Yes, so the first logo was a derivation from the Wyoming state logo, so the bucking bronco is adapted by my artist friend Elizabeth Porter, but he's riding an eight-legged Sleipnir (Figure 9a). Unfortunately, few people noticed it had 8 legs! So I decided to ask her for something a little bit more obvious, so she made me the raven with the cowboy hat, since it kind of evokes Odin and the mystique of the raven in the North (and we have ravens here too), but the hat makes it me (Figure 9b). I like that a lot. Recently, she has made me another version: with a raven hoisting a flag and with a message thanking my Patreon supporters (Figure 9c). I sometimes have a little bit of fun mixing it up. On another level, and I've said this multiple times, I do feel the sagas are a little bit like Westerns. They are not the same genre by any means. One difference I've drawn attention to, is how strange from the Western perspective is the attitude towards the Norwegian royal family. Still, it is a nostalgic literature set in a frontier at a time removed from ours where we project our fantasies onto the time, and those fantasies change. Likewise, we can see those fantasies change over time. There's been a lot of work looking at the sagas in this regard, and this works for Westerns too, comparing say *True Grit* in the '60s and it's a different movie from the one made in the 2010s. Also, they constitute a big part of the identity of people from those regions, or at least traditionally. So here in rural Colorado and Wyoming it's 'cowboys and Indians' stories and the Marlboro Man is from my nearest town, and there is an Indian reservation just a little

²⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZFkPaoafBo&list=LLRD7gIrwOmLN_D4_0RbLtSA&index=56&t=0s

way from my home. On occasions, I was late to school because there was a trail drive crossing the road. This gets back to my videos and why the landscape is *not* a prop and I find it funny that people think I've created this for the videos. A lot of people think I live in a movie and this is entertaining. But this is real: I know people who have grizzly bear scars! And what is really funny is some people think I'm filming in front of a green screen! For a few months people were insistent about it, as if it would be easier to do that than walking outside. Hence I tried to do more 'walking away' at the end of videos to try and convince people that it is a real landscape! It's also really fun.

Another thing that I'm starting is a time lapse at the end of the video – I'll just leave my phone recording at the end of the video so you can see the birds flying and the shadows changing.

HW: I recall one with ravens on, and you have another with a wolf. So you've already used the wildlife. From a British perspective, it feels closer to Scandinavia because the wild animals are there close by.

JC: The closest I come to bragging is when I talk about my homeland. For example, I've had a bear break into my house! This landscape and its wildlife are a way by which I feel I can make parallels to the landscapes of Scandinavia and other regions where Norse languages were spoken. One area of close connection that is worth pointing out is that in the sagas, people are in rural societies living close to the land. So many of these connections are completely lost – practical issues including how much firewood to have stored up – something mentioned in *Hávamál*. These are issues disconnected from modern life for many and the interaction with landscape, the changing seasons, is something that is central to understanding Norse societies. And this is something where I do feel I have a close sense of coming from this landscape and I've tried to mention in my videos. People try to think about Norse societies as 'warrior cultures' when in fact they are better described as a 'combative farming culture', which is not that different from quite recent times in the American Western culture.²¹ It's a literature of people who are closely acquainted with the land but also have a certain respect or even reverence for the land. My grandfather was fascinated by mountain lions but he never saw one with his own eyes as they are very elusive, and yet I saw three on the day he died and I can never look at them again in the same way.

Whether it is a coincidence, people do superstitiously look for connections and associations, and people work out their remedies and solutions. For example *Hávamál* mentions the use of maggots against poisonous bites, but ideas like this needn't relate to a systematic understanding of magic and the world, but from practical experience derived from close engagement with the landscape.

HW: Do you think that while people are learning from you about Norse culture, they are also learning a lot about Wyoming and Colorado, its nature and history.

JC: Maybe, but my 'favourite places' videos are my least watched videos. Second, people aren't as interested in human heroes: the sagas. Myths are what gets most attention, together with other key words: gods, runes and vikings.

But, I have more social media followers than either the Colorado or Wyoming boards of tourism. Indeed, occasionally I do get people asking me about travel advice. I do like that people want to visit and see the landscapes are real. I know millions go to Yellowstone, but perhaps it seems real or a potted plant to them but Wyoming and parts of Colorado are among some of the last places in the USA where nature isn't something you plan into your cities, but cities and other human dwellings you have to plan into nature. You are out on your own and have your truck loaded with many things you think you won't need but might get you out of situations. For example, I always have a pickaxe with me and it is surprising how many times I end up having to use it. I think it's just fun to show people this is still there. I could have made

²¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8o1Z_pwi0I&t=47s

my channel as 'Rocky Mountain Lifestyles' and probably no one would watch it, but it is good to sneak that into the background.

One further point: there are places I will never film or talk about. Similarly, in my Preface to my books, I mention the places where I finish the work, but I always ensure they are not at fragile places that might attract the attention of uncaredful tourists. I'm thinking of the ruins of ghost towns, or a spot I know where Yellowstone releases its 'problem bears.' More generally, I rarely identify specific locations and prefer to keep it vague in case there are unintended consequences.

The Future

HW: Have you plans for the future of this channel?

JC: If I truly get sick of it, I intend to stop. There are quite a few times when I'll become very frustrated about the process and the feedback or I doubt whether it is being treated seriously, but because I have a time-delay buffer between production and posting, the feeling usually passes before there is any noticeable lag in production. It's just part of my routine now. If I felt like I was running out of things to say, I would cut back on the frequency. The situation of academia now and tenure-track being so rare, I don't think my work situation will change, so actually YouTube is now a more predictable way to make a living! It is similar in some ways, it is a way to be a public intellectual. Not that I'm comparing myself to him in a direct and simple way, but I like the analogy to an earlier generation where Carl Sagan popularised astronomy and had the famous TV series *Cosmos*, and wrote popular books subsequently. But while this may have affected his ability to do his own research, without him, I think, and without the popular grounding he provided, we would see even more nonsense and misinformation about the universe spreading.

While I don't pretend my channel has reached that level of popularity, I do hold Sagan up as a role model. But a big difference is the ease of making online videos available to the public: if I had spent all the time I had spent on these videos trying to get PBS to give me a TV series, I'd still not have a TV series.

A further point is that no one thinks Vikings are as popular as they are and it really amazes me. The audience is huge, but people often presume there isn't an audience. I was talking to a friend and he said 'how do you feel about writing books that probably nobody reads'. I responded saying that my *Poetic Edda* translation sold 15,000 copies last year alone (Crawford 2015). There's so much interest in the mythology and most people are simply consulting secondary sources. I want people to engage with the primary sources alongside these secondary accounts.

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The Image Hoard: Using the Past as a Palette in Discussing the Politics of the Present

Wulfgar the Bard

Most early medieval art has been lost. Time, wars, religious reformation and simple decay and abandon mean that only a tiny fraction of what was produced has survived. Yet, early medieval art often survives in a way that much else from the period has not. Joanna Story, in her introduction to the British Library's Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms exhibition catalogue says, 'there is a preservation bias in favour of luxury manuscripts over utilitarian ones. Many of the former were treasured at the time and by subsequent generations as great works of art...' (Breay and Story 2018). This suggests that art holds a special place in the human imagination that has given it a preferential survival. It is a treasure and an image hoard that has been jealously guarded over the centuries; cherished, cared for and then passed on. This hoard is now becoming digital and accessible in a way that was previously unimaginable. What was once locked away in museums and libraries is now online, easily available to anyone interested to study and use. So, I use it as a source of inspiration. I use these images, some familiar, steeped in religion and politics while others are a mystery, having lost their original meaning. But they survive, and I recast them. I use them as a palette to disrupt the political narrative of the present. This chapter outlines the rationale and context for my artistic uses of early medieval imagery in the context of current political news stories. The chapter looks at the use and misappropriation of early medieval art, its influence on modern culture and how the combination of both together has become the inspiration for a new piece of art aiming to preserve a current memory into the future.

Introduction

This chapter will examine the layers of medieval and modern imagery contained in the Chronicle of Mercia, the story of Donaeld the Unready as told by Wulfgar the Bard. In doing so, the aim is to illustrate how the repurposing of early medieval imagery has come about from an interest in and exposure to early medieval material over a 25-year archaeological career and how this has become intertwined, through art, with current political events. The resulting cartoons are a disrupting thread that vent Wulfgar's anger at the social and economic injustices, seen many times in the past and being repeated today.

'I am Wulfgar; Herald and Bard; Chronicler of Donaeld the Unready'

In the tenth century AD, Ahmad Ibn Fadlan set out on a journey from Baghdad to visit the King of the Bulgars (Frye and Blake 1949: 7–37). His travels took him through numerous lands and he met many people. He observed and recorded them, and he would judge them based on his own moral values. He was not frightened to call out what he thought was wrong and is famously quoted as having compared the Oğuz tribe in Turkey to 'asses gone astray' (Frye and Blake 1949: 15). I, like Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, am also an outsider. I am not a native of Mercia (America) and I too observe and record what I see from afar; because I see echoes of injustice here in my homeland, I too comment on what I feel is wrong.

I do this by drawing satirical cartoons in a style heavily influenced by the Bayeux Tapestry (Bayeux Tapestry c. 1070; Reading Museum 2014; Hicks 2006). They are drawn in ink, coloured using a computer and distributed as a thread on Twitter – a chronicle in modern form. Each panel contains layers of meaning, some direct, which are easy to understand and others that are references to historical imagery and hidden. Each panel is an interpretation of current events and a protest against the rise of bigotry and intolerance. They are produced to help overcome a feeling of impotence felt when one's views appear not to be represented by the politicians of the day. All the images are produced to try and

preserve the folly of current events from being forgotten in the future by casting these events in an early medieval style. The aim is to show that modern leaders would not look out of place in the past.

The common theme is the chronicle, the saga, the oral history told by the bard in the mead hall. This idea of each image being part of a tapestry is conveyed by using a common, textured background. This is reinforced by using a restricted colour palette, a font referencing the Bayeux Tapestry and the repeated use of period 'memes' such as naming the key characters with epithets (a word or phrase describing a person's character), the use of mystical creatures, birds and the occasional use of upper and lower margins. Like a magpie, I take existing imagery and reuse and repurpose it with the aim of helping the viewer question current events (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Donald the Unready: This is the image used to begin the Chronicle of Mercia. It was first posted on Twitter on 16 February 2017 and – unknown to most of my followers – it is mostly made up of images pirated from an earlier online chronicle telling the story of Beowulf (Middleton 2012; Middleton 2017a: 46–47)

‘Wulfgar, from the line of bards who pillage the past for ideas’

I chronicle events as they happen. It is a commentary and a record influenced by my liberal political views. I try to make my images amusing by highlighting what I see as the ironies, inconsistencies and bigotry of current political events. I try not to invent events but instead aim to interpret current news stories as if chronicled a thousand years in the past. This idea is not original and there is a long pedigree in doing this, with one of the most famous being Rea Irvin’s *‘D-Day Invasion of France, 1944’* which uses the Bayeux Tapestry as inspiration to immortalise the allied landings in Normandy for the July 15 1944



Figure 2: Above: The swastika from Meigle stone 26 (Allen and Anderson 1903: 303 fig. 319). Below: Donaeld's Casket (posted to Twitter on 15 September 2018), based on the Franks Casket. It incorporates the Meigle swastika into the scene (top centre). Added to each figure in this scene is the Republican Party logo of the elephant

issue of *The New Yorker* – an image aimed at memorialising the event but also paying homage to the Normandy invasions itself with Bayeux being one of the first towns liberated (Hicks 2006; *The New Yorker* 1944; Schiller 2010).

This is dangerous territory since it joins a long history of cultural appropriation and misappropriation of the Middle Ages. Nosheen Iqbal, writing in the *Guardian*, quotes Donna Zuckerberg highlighting a

current example of ‘classical texts being ‘distorted and stripped of context’ online to lend gravitas to campaigns of misogyny and white supremacy’ (Iqbal 2018). Hitler and the Nazis took misappropriation to another level, actively commissioning archaeological research to support their ideas (Arnold 2006): a practice so well known it has become the underlying premise of Hollywood movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). The Nazis thought nothing of defacing historic artefacts to validate and support their propaganda around the idea of ‘racial hygiene’ and their assertion of the Aryans being a master race (Imer 2018). Most visibly, they adopted the ancient symbol of the swastika as their emblem. The swastika is a symbol I have intentionally used in my art because of its association with the Nazi party and the early medieval period. It provides an immediate short hand for extreme right-wing views but is also a symbol common across early medieval Europe with some famous examples found in Scotland on a grave slab in Meigle (Figure 2) (Allen and Anderson 1903); on a bucket from the Oseberg Viking ship burial in Norway (University of Oslo Cultural Heritage Museum 2018) and on a copper-alloy hanging bowl from the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 ship burial in England (Bruce-Mitford 1983: 250–251). A part of me wants to try and reclaim the swastika from the Nazis by highlighting its earlier, benign Neolithic, Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon uses (Bennett 2008; Hitchens 2017; Marsden 2010; Oakden 2014) although this is probably impossible as, ‘... a piece of medieval culture ... that you know has been appropriated as a symbol by right-wing nationalists or racists...[leaves you] in the uncomfortable position of having to treat it as both benign and hostile at the same time’ (Sturtevant 2017). In terms of modern misrepresentation, Schlanger writes, ‘... the problem of misrepresentation and misappropriation of the past is one that affects all of ... the experts, the professional producers, promoters and protectors of archaeological heritage, be it within academia or the commercial sector.’ He describes the modern villain as being, ‘...the slow inexorable relocation of scientific knowledge within the market economy, with resulting expectations of value for money’ (Schlanger 2018).

The chronicle of Mercia uses the early medieval period as a lens through which to view the present. There is no ambition to validate present policy or re-write the past. The difference between the recasting of early medieval images in the Chronicle of Mercia and the misappropriation of early medieval images and ideas by the alt-right is that there is no ambition in the chronicle of Mercia to justify the current agenda by using the past as a foundation for those ideas or aiming to change interpretations of the past to fit a modern narrative. The misappropriation of the past by the right sees nationhood rooted in an imaginary prehistoric past (Brophy 2018); white Anglo-Saxon ancestry validated by ‘ancient DNA’ (Richardson and Booth 2017); misogyny justified by classical authors (Iqbal 2018) and racial superiority justified by excavation and appropriation (Arnold 2006). At its extreme the alt-right use of the past spirals into conspiracy theories such as the Akhenaten-Obama New World Order conspiracy which casts Obama as a clone of the ‘mad’ Pharaoh Akhenaten and the world governed by a ‘New World Order’ funded by clandestine Jewish ‘dark’ money. These are ideas so ridiculous, odious and lacking foundation I have no intention of giving them oxygen by citing references to them here.

‘Deep in the mists of time, is the kingdom of Mercia, ruled by King Donaeld the Unready’

I did not invent Donaeld the Unready. He burst onto Twitter at the beginning of February 2017 and is the invention of archaeologist Ben Saunders (@donaeldunready). Ben, who having tapped into an early medieval nerve, had already gained a large following by the time I found him. I discovered him ‘retweeted’ in my ‘feed’ by many of the historical and archaeological types I follow. Angry at the political situation in the UK, yet feeling unable to comment due to various reasons, an early medieval parody mocking the similar lurch toward nationalism in the USA felt like an opportunity to vent my pent-up anger, in a style I had been developing since the late 1990s.

Ben had already created much of the imaginary online world of Mercia. Donaeld is the King of Mercia (America); he is going to Make Mercia Great Again (#MAGA); he is going to drain the fens (swamp);

build a dyke (wall) and rides around on Mare Horse One (Air Force One) whilst governing from his Great White Hall (the White House).

‘Lo, there do I see his followers...’

The online world of Mercia was also well populated when I arrived, inhabited by characters including The Jorvik Times (@JorvikTimes), a parody of The New York Times newspaper; Sean Halfwity (@SeanTheHalfwity), taking on the role of the conservative talk show host Sean Hannity and Æthelflæd (@AethelflaedR) being the president’s Democratic party rival, Hillary Clinton. It was a surprise, on meeting Donaeld, to find out that Mercia’s growth was entirely organic and not coordinated by him. Many of the online alter-egos have come and gone while new ones, like Vlad the Rus (@VladimirKhagan), playing Russia’s president Putin, have arrived to take their place. New characters continue to spawn with Gregorius Turonensis (@GTuronensis), arriving on the scene in May and King Boorish of Wessex (@KingBoorish) in late July 2019. At the time of writing the community continues to be strong, with a core of accounts ‘tweeting’ in and out of character in response to current events (Figure 3).

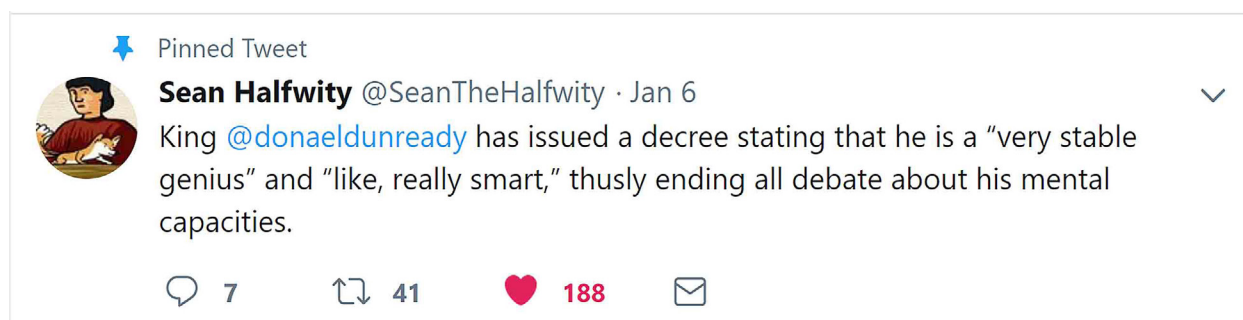


Figure 3: An example of a tweet from one of Donaeld the Unready’s followers, Sean Halfwity (Halfwity 2018)

‘...and the source of all knowledge’

The inspiration comes from the US administration and their constant supply of ‘material’ on which the community can ‘riff’. Donaeld, Æthelflæd, Vlad, Sean, The Jorvik Times and the many others in Mercia post and respond to each other on most of the stories coming out of the administration. There is no coordination that I am aware of.

Tweets were 140 characters when Donaeld began (now double that number) and Donaeld’s parody is quick and tailored to ‘fit’ this format. Drawings take longer to produce, and I found that I needed to accept not being able to respond at the same time as the rest of Mercia. I also discovered that, if I did not respond quickly enough, a drawing would soon become obsolete as it was superseded by the next event. Yet, as the aim is to chronicle, I have produced several panels ‘late’ for the sake of completeness – much as the Bayeux Tapestry itself was created years after the events it represents.

The speed of the news cycle was something I had not anticipated. There has been no shortage of ‘material’ to provide inspiration. The joy of ‘Mercia’ is that it responds to the politics of the administration in Washington by laughing at it. The main ambition then, is to produce a satirical image that is both humorous and politically pointed. The rapid turnover of stories means there is both a short lifespan for each panel, where it is ‘current’, and a constant demand for new ideas for the next panel. This rapid turnover has also prompted me to look at exploring more enduring formats to ensure there is a legacy and I will return to this later.

‘... in a land of Kings and Warriors and Craftsmen and Priests’

The entire chronicle is about resistance. Where each panel makes a specific statement relating to a current news event, each panel also aims to say, ‘What they are doing is wrong. Hold them to account. Remember and resist!’ In their small way, the contents of each panel aim to unravel the spin, psychological manipulation and lies and focus the reader’s attention back on to what is important. This is the furrow normally worked by the editorial cartoonist but, in these times, to hold up a mirror to current events can be enough to for cartoonists to lose their jobs (Brown 2019).

The panels aspire to use the early medieval context to show the folly of the issue being discussed. This requires the reader to have a certain understanding of the period and a basic idea of the politics of the time. Although for a different purpose, Leslie Alcock (2002) provides a useful definition of the term ‘politics’ as I use it here, describing it ‘as a convenient shorthand ... for the structures of society and especially the structures of power and their functioning’ (Alcock 2002: 32). This is the foundation of the chronicle and the primary connection between the present and the past. It is this metaphor, suggesting that there is a similarity to the regime today and the social and economic injustices inflicted on the people of the past by an unconstrained monarchy that underpins the entire project. It is a simple idea, used regularly by the media and cartoonists such as Ann Telnaes (@AnnTelnaes), the editorial cartoonist on *The Washington Post*, in cartoons such as ‘The Imperial President’ (Telnaes 2018).

Yet for all its familiarity as a concept, there is little doubt that it is easy to push the metaphor too far. Several of my panels have been described as obscure because of the connections to unrecognised period detail, rendering the images confusing and occasionally meaningless. My cousin commented that she ‘didn’t get’ many of my panels and that ‘the images pass straight over her head’. The chronicle is therefore not wholly inclusive and can on occasion seem exclusive to those that do not recognise the connections. My primary motivation is to express my own frustration and to show that the issues discussed matter to me. As a political statement, I want it known that I stand opposed to the current regime – for anyone thinking that this is an easy stance to take as an individual using a pseudonym on social media, I agree. My use of a pseudonym came from an earlier project where I posted an illustrated version of the story of *Beowulf* to Twitter. The name stuck and fits well in the ecosystem of Mercia but, as the chronicle has become about resistance, I want it known that I resisted and for this reason I include my real name in my Twitter bio. As pieces of art, the panels express my frustration and, in creating them it often feels like they create themselves. There is a sense of being detached, an observer to the artistic process as they evolve on the page and this makes me ask: ‘why change them?’

‘Yet not all are content’

Early medieval social hierarchy was complex and varied (Alcock 2003). Most people know from popular media and school history that kings and queens would have been at the top with warriors, freemen, priests, farmers, trades people and slaves below them (BBC 2018; Deary and Brown 1996). Although how we view these social hierarchies has now been challenged by Susan Reynolds as a ‘conceptual lens’ through which modern historians have distorted medieval society, the fact remains that those at the bottom of society held few rights and their lives were governed by the whims of those of higher social rank (Reynolds 1996: 1-16).

The social hierarchy was fundamentally unjust. Those born into land and wealth ruled over and exploited those born without. A social structure brilliantly satirised in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) when Dennis asks King Arthur about how he became king: ‘And how did you get that? By exploiting the workers! By hanging on to outdated imperialist dogma which perpetuates the social and economic differences in our society!’ He goes on, “We’re living in a dictatorship, a self-perpetuating autocracy...

[and] strange women lying in ponds, distributing swords is no basis of a system of government! Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony' (Idle 2004: 12–15).



Figure 4: 'The High Priest Jimi.' One of the most pleasing and unexpected outcomes of posting the panels on Twitter has been seeing how they have galvanised others to resist. This image shows postcards from the Chronicle of Mercia being sent out to congressmen with the addition of Jimi Hendrix and Diwali stamps and a note of protest about the Republican Party's tax reform bill, H.R. 1. Tax cuts and jobs act. (Image courtesy of James Jarrard)

By mentioning the wholly fantastical story of the Lady of the Lake giving King Arthur the sword Excalibur, and this underpinning his legitimacy as King, Dennis is calling out the innate unfairness in the social structure of monarchy. Moreover, as Dennis goes on to use language familiar to us as that used stereotypically by trade union representatives, it highlights how the lot of the worker has improved since this time. I hope to do the reverse. By presenting the president as an early medieval king, I aim to show how his actions do not look out of place in that setting and how they are often childish, autocratic and dictatorial. Ultimately, I hope to show how his actions are eroding rights and returning society to where the poorest and most vulnerable are mercilessly exploited. The panels aspire to use the early medieval context to show the folly of the issue discussed. It would be nice to think that they have opened the eyes of some to what is going on and that they have galvanised the will of others to resist (Figures 4 and 5).



Figure 5: @SootAndShale protest at the anti-Trump demonstration on the 13th July 2018 and at the People's March in London on 20 October 2018 wearing homemade 'Welcome to Mercia' and 'Donald is a Rus Puppet' t-shirts that incorporate images distributed online by Wulfgar the Bard. (Image courtesy of Phillip Chapman, @SootAndShale) (@SootAndShale 2018a and 2018b)

'I have heard tell of an ancient image hoard'

It is the Bayeux Tapestry that has had the greatest impact on the drawing style (Figure 7). I first mimicked it in a small oil painting to celebrate the birth of my daughter in AD 1996. The focus on the people participating in the events depicted and the naming of these people makes this style particularly good

for capturing and immortalising important family events such as weddings, milestone birthdays and new arrivals as well as political events. The margins are good places to ‘pack in’ tiny named characters and I have gone on to produce many drawings of this style for family and friends over the years. In 2012 I reached a point where I wanted to apply the technique to something longer. I wanted to tell a story in the form of a tapestry or scroll. I chose *Beowulf*, the earliest known text to survive in Old English, as translated by Seamus Heaney (Heaney 1999a). The aim was to present the result as a ‘virtual’ tapestry called, ‘The Beowulf Scroll’ (Middleton 2012). While translating *Beowulf*, Heaney talked about the, ‘word hoard’ an early medieval source of inspiration to him and, while listening to him talk (Heaney 1999b) and working on my take on the Beowulf story, I realised that there was another early medieval hoard left to us, an image hoard that could be used to give my work an element of period authenticity. It was at this stage that I began to colour digitally and, having become aware of this hoard, I found myself wanting to reference original period objects wherever I could (Figure 6).

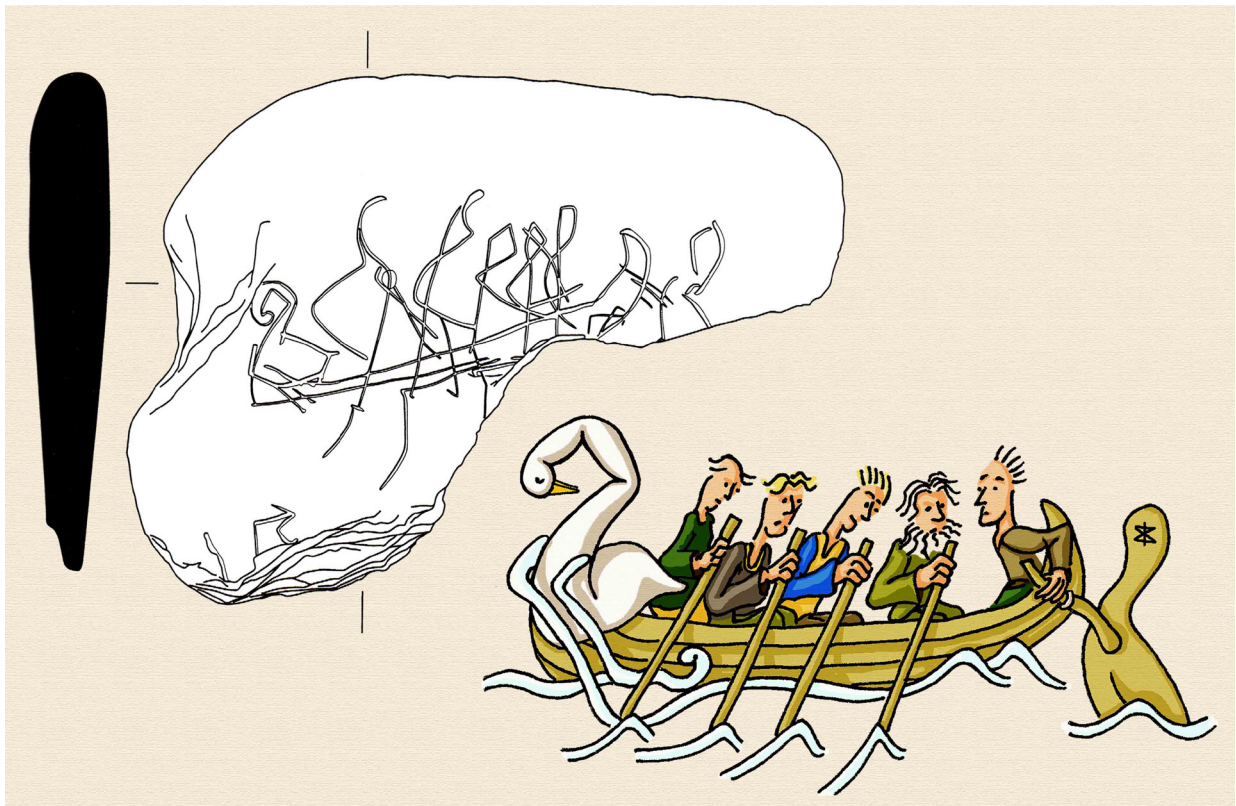


Figure 6: ‘The North.’ Panel 31 from ‘The Beowulf Scroll’, (Middleton 2012; Middleton 2017a: 46-47) and stone IS. 51 from the excavations of the early Christian site of Inchmarnock, Scotland (Headland Archaeology), (Lowe 2008: 278-279)

‘An equal in all ways to the word hoard’

Wulfgar the Bard emerged as a mechanism to depict the opening of *Beowulf*. The poem begins, ‘Hwæt’, and, at the time, it was taken to mean ‘yo!’ or ‘listen’ – an oral command requiring a character to deliver it (Heaney 1999a) (This has since been challenged by George Walkden who suggests it means, ‘How we have heard of the might of the kings.’ (Walkden 2013)). Wulfgar commands his audience to listen as if demanding the attention of the mead hall. In this way Wulfgar becomes part of the story and occasionally features in the images themselves – holding the slate in bottom left of Figure 1, controlling the steering oar (Figure 6) or standing at the bottom right in Swindon (Figure 14). Wulfgar promotes

the idea of recounting stories as if he has personally experienced them – the proto-photo-journalist – playing on the suggestion that the saga and epic poem are the written embodiment of an older, oral tradition.

Hail to the speaker and him who listens. Whoever learns these words prosper because of them. Hail to those who listen.” *Hávamál* from the Codex Regius (Crossley-Holland 1980)

When introducing ‘The Beowulf Scroll’ to Twitter it seemed natural to adopt Wulfgar as my pseudonym. Twitter is a conversation, almost poem-like in its restricted format – each tweet a new stanza, and Wulfgar allows me to take on the role of the early medieval bard recounting current events with Wulfgar delivering the performance. Those who are familiar with Wulfgar’s posts hopefully slip in to the ‘early medieval’ performance space – when seeing the icon and name, distinguishing it from the modern world around it. Wulfgar provides a place in which to escape into an imaginary past.

Unlike Arthur in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Monty Python and the Holy Grail 1975), William of Baskerville in *The Name of the Rose* (Eco 1984), Noggin in *Noggin the King* (Postgate and Firmin 1965) or Hägar in *Hägar the Horrible* (Browne 1974), Wulfgar is an observer rather than the protagonist. This allows him to slip from one story to another – initially telling the story of *Beowulf*, currently chronicling Donaeld, perhaps telling a different story in the future (e.g. Figures 7–10).

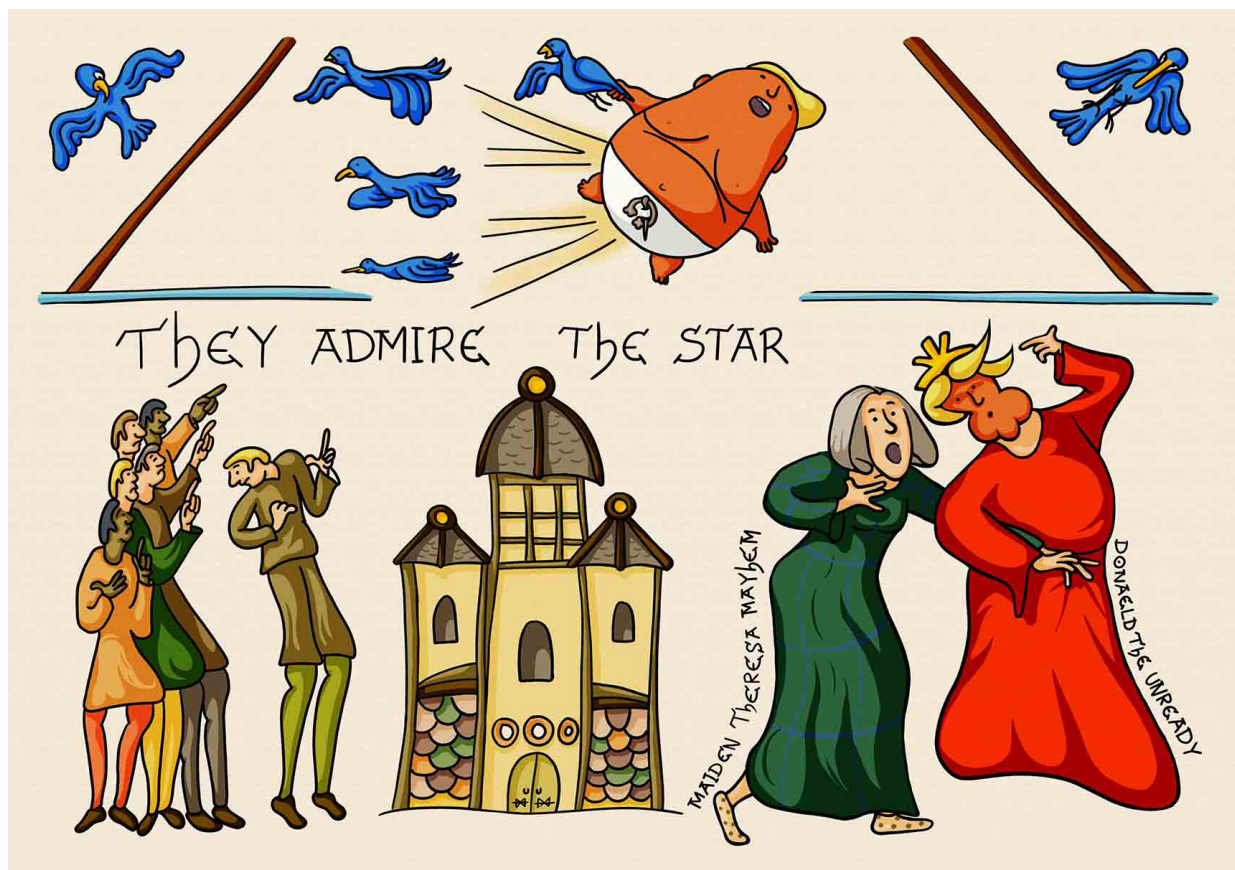


Figure 7: Chronicle of the president’s visit to London in July 2018 with blimp and twitter birds. Based on the comet scene from the Bayeux Tapestry of c. AD 1070

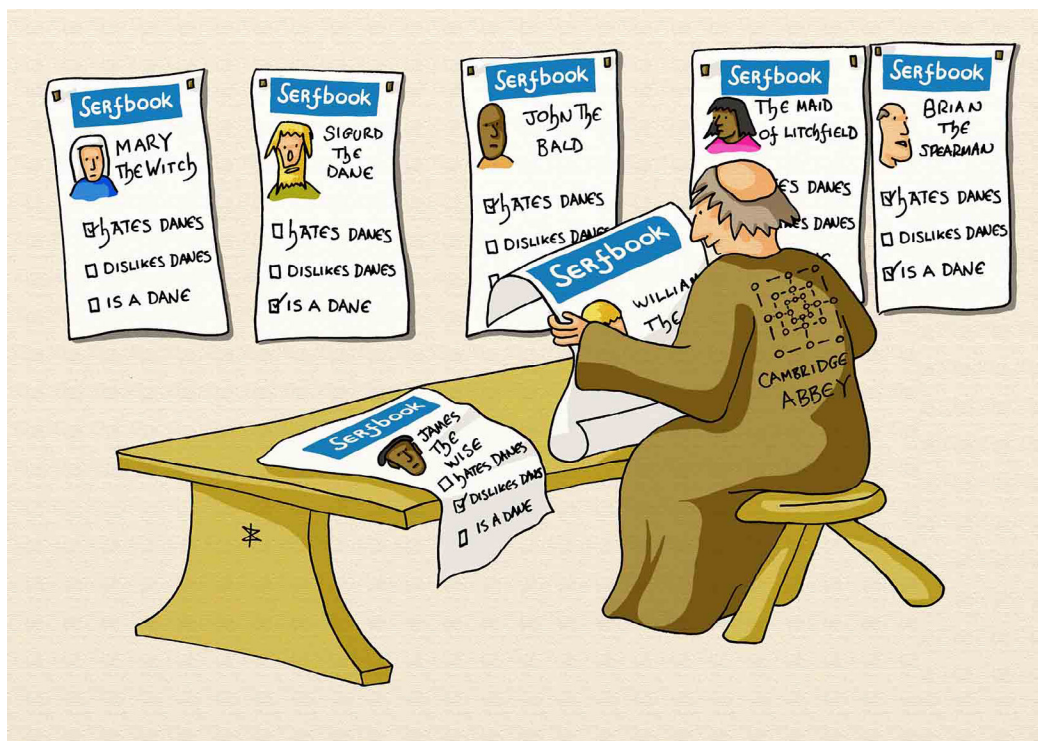


Figure 8: Chronicle of reports that Cambridge Abbey Analytica (Cambridge Analytica) misused Serfbook (Facebook) data during the Mercian (American) and Wessex (UK) elections (Price 2019)



Figure 9: 'Lest we forget', a chronicle recording the president cancelling a cemetery visit due to bad weather during the centenary of the armistice. The panel references a Pictish symbol stone – Aberlemno 2 – depicting a battle scene, said to be the battle of Nechtansmere (Allen and Anderson 1903, 210 fig. 227B; HES 2019)

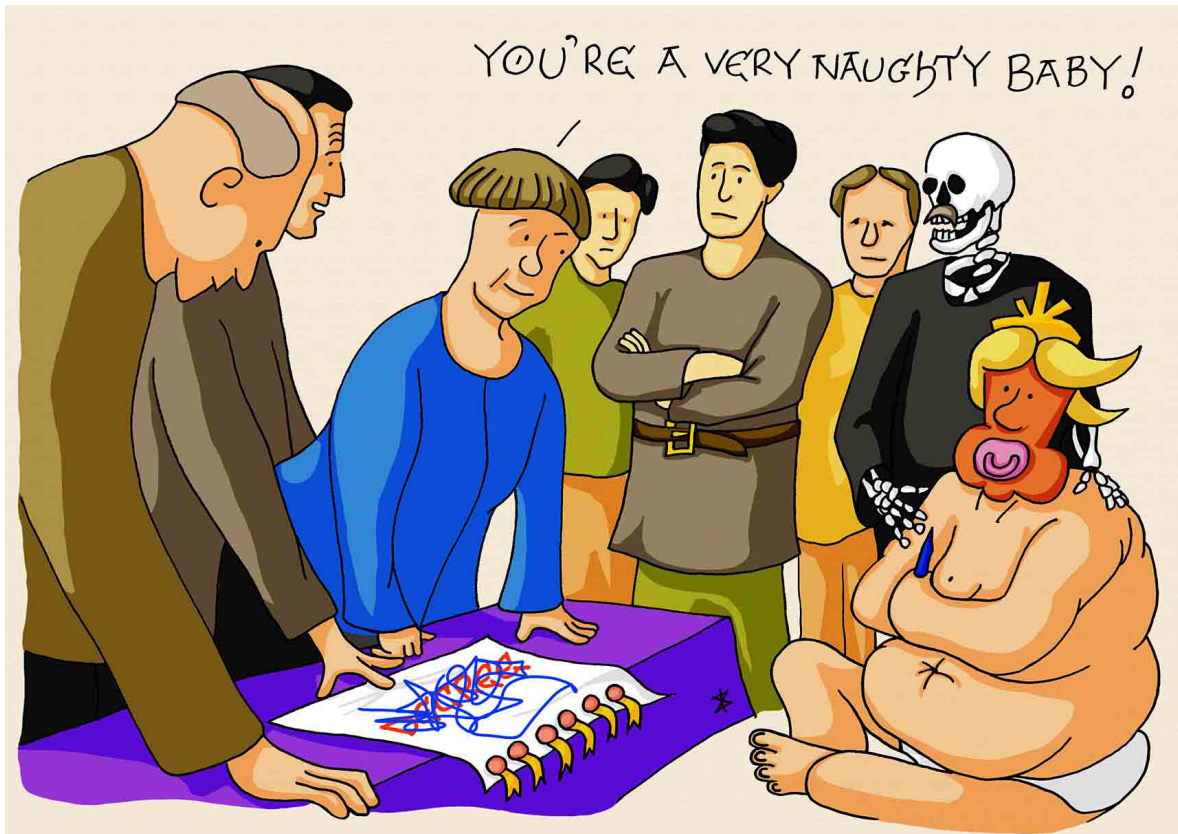


Figure 10: 'A Very Naughty Baby', a chronicle based on a photo shared on Instagram by Chancellor Angela Merkel during a recent G7 summit in Canada (Bundeskanzlerin 2018)

'Known only to those who value the past'

I am not an early medieval specialist, but I do have a keen interest in the period and I work in archaeology. This period has had a profound influence on my life. As a child I grew up in Shetland and I was keenly aware of the importance the local community placed on their Norse heritage. Living in Scotland, and having an interest in art, I found Pictish art at an early age and I have gone on to spend many days visiting Pictish stones – in particular, the stones of Aberlemno (Middleton 2017b). My first experience of an archaeological dig was on an Anglo-Saxon settlement near West Heslerton in North Yorkshire (Powlesland 2000). While working in France I worked on the Merovingian site of La Calotterie in the Somme (Desfossés 1997; Desfossés and Blancquaert 1998) and I lived not too far from Bayeux. Due to the fame of the tapestry to all in the UK, I took every family member to visit it and so saw it many times. Then, on my return to Scotland, while working as an illustrator, I was charged with illustrating the incised slates from Inchmarnock (Lowe 2008) – in particular, the now famous 'Hostage Stone' – and overseeing the illustration of the Whithorn Crozier (Low 2009: 92) (Figure 11).

'To those who listened to the learning of great scholars'

If there is any value in my work for early medieval scholars, it is in highlighting their period of interest and their work to a much broader audience. Although many of my followers have a background in studying the past, most don't, so, although not my aim, in reusing early medieval imagery such as the drawings of Onfirm from Novgord (Schaeken 2012: 101), there has been an educational bonus – at least as far as introducing my audience to early mediaeval images they were not aware of (Figure 12).



Figure 11: Left: The Whithorn Crozier © Headland Archaeology. Right: A detail of the Whithorn Crozier as drawn by Craig Williams with the addition of fish drawn by the author and inspired by the Crozier. The crozier is decorated in tiers of characters starting with biblical figures at the foot of the shaft and moving up to animals and fish in the spiral (Lowe 2009: 92; Williams 2009)



Meggilyweggily @meggy_head · Mar 3

Replying to @WulfgarTheBard @BrianRhys

OMG this is adorable. I'd never heard of Onfim. Who'd have thought that the doodles of a little boy of no importance would turn into archaeological finds important enough to give him a Wikipedia entry of his own 700 years later.



Figure 12: A response on Twitter to an image reusing a drawing, originally drawn on birch bark, by Onfim from Novgorod (Meggilyweggily 2018; Schaeken 2012: 101)

In a similar vein the Chronicle of Mercia has provided some current scholars with a tool which links the past to the present. An example would be where images from the Chronicle of Mercia were used in a recent workshop at the Offa's Dyke Association with one scholar saying,

...much of my work is about how archaeology can help us understand our contemporary world, especially landscapes of power and conflicted environments. I'm asking how we can claim to understand contested landscapes with so little historical context using the

example of the early medieval Anglo-Welsh border as a case study. It's an obvious point to make, but one that can be difficult to encapsulate. Your images ... aptly make the point for me – they are literally gold dust...[and] whether members of a given audience are on Twitter or not, once they've seen the [image they] understand the point I'm trying to make so it saves me a massive amount of context setting and I'm able to move onto why and how I'm doing what I'm doing. (Mel Roxby-Mackey 2018, pers. comm. 24 June) (Figure 13).

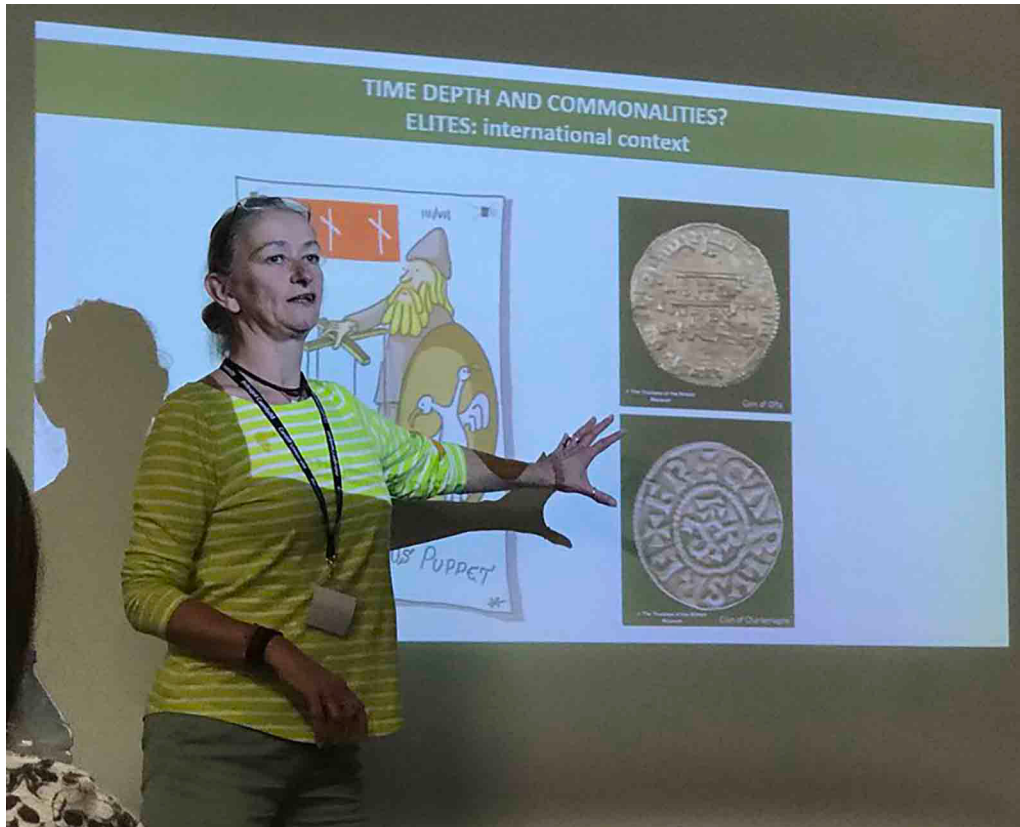


Figure 13: Mel Roxby-Mackey presenting at the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) in 2017 using images from the Chronicle of Mercia to help illustrate key concepts (Image courtesy of Ian Mackey)

More than anything, I am a student looking for new ideas to feed the chronicle and, here again, Twitter has provided. I follow many early medieval scholars, far too many to list, but there are a few that are worthy of mention. I often find inspiration from accounts involved in digitising or discussing medieval manuscripts. The British Library and the Cambridge Digital Library are two truly incredible resources. Specific accounts I follow are the British Library's Medieval Manuscripts collection (@BLMedieval) and the Cambridge Digital Library (@CamDigLib) (the early Christian and early Islamic texts). Similarly, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France account, (@GallicaBnF) is of regular interest for newly scanned material. For his use of medieval imagery as a form of emoji, Damien Kempf (@DamienKempf) is often stimulating and satirical and for her tendency to focus on the smaller details in illuminated pages, Prof Emily Steiner (@PiersatPenn) can be inspiring. For their posts on the early medieval landscape Dr Susan Oosthuizen (@DrSueOosthuizen) and Dr Caitlin Green (@caitlinrgreen) interest me and, for his mix of early medieval and contemporary culture, Dr Levi Roach (@DrLRoach).

Where Twitter has provided a platform for posting the images, engaging with the community and providing inspiration, Facebook has been more useful for creating a stable, long term collection.

The tools, although similar to Twitter, allow for a little more structure and these have enabled me to effectively create a full catalogue of panels with references and links – something that I have personally found useful while writing this manuscript.



Figure 14: Two panels depicting alternative interpretations of, 'The Massacre of Swindon'. Left: 'Breitbart Chronicle: Swindon RAVISHED BY HAIRY DANES. WESSEX HELPLESS. BUILD THE SHIELD WALL.' Right: 'Jorvik Times: Swindon NOT pillaged by Vikings, normal Friday night.' The image on the left references the mutilated bodies of the Bayeux Tapestry battle scene (Bayeux Tapestry c 1070; Reading Museum 2014) while the image on the right includes references to early medieval material culture such as hawking bells (Wallis 2017: 1–28) and gameboards (Lowe 2008: 116–128)



Figure 15: Two responses on Twitter to the fake terror attack in Swindon. James Hogg says, 'Je Suis Swindon', meaning in English, 'I am Swindon' (Hogg 2017), and referencing the response to the terror attack on the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (Paris on 25 January 2015). Jonathan Mitchell QC jokingly questions why the main stream media (MSM) have not picked up on the attack – hinting at a cover up (Mitchell 2017)

'For they tell of lands where kings rule by deceiving their people'

Twitter is all about followers. Followers are the group that amplify the message by liking and 'retweeting' to their following. Where the early Christian monks headed off in boats to convert the heathens, today, if wanting to do the same, they would head online. The high priests of social media command millions of followers and the medium gives the impression of intimacy, reinforced when an acolyte manages to communicate directly with their idol.

This one-to-one connection, cutting out the filter of the media (whose role is ostensibly to challenge and expose untruths), is exploited by politicians. Some use this to lie, defend the indefensible and shout down those who oppose them with facts. The American political right has ‘weaponised’ this tactic to confuse their following and wear down their capacity to distinguish between what is true and what is false (Bump 2016). This is a form of psychological manipulation known as gaslighting, named after the 1938 Patrick Hamilton play, *Gas Light* (1938). This is not the paper to explore the full extent of the psychological manipulation being carried out online. But, it is important to acknowledge that a major motivation for the Chronicle of Mercia is to record the gaslighting so that it is not forgotten. It aims to provide a lasting memory to deny the long-term ambition of gaslighting, which is to have the lies believed and the truths forgotten. The ‘Massacre of Swindon’ (Figure 14) was produced as a direct response to the invention, by the president, of a fictitious terror attack in Sweden (Topping 2017) and the images immediately gained a response (Figure 15).

‘It is the story of the present’

The Chronicle of Mercia is primarily a critique of current US politics, so mapping early medieval political structures to current political events has been an important process. Many of the principles of government we recognise today are known to exist during this period (Turner 2000). The practice of gathering to talk at a meeting place to resolve differences and elect chiefs provides a useful analogy for modern political parliaments and organisations. The Anglo-Saxon assembly, known as the moot, the Norse assembly, known as a þing and the fictional meetings of King Arthur’s knights at the round table have all been useful in satirising recent political gatherings of world leaders such as the G7 (Moot 7), G20 (The G20 Thing) and the Security Council (the Round Table).

Illegal immigration has been high on the political agenda and this has also mapped easily to early medieval Britain in that it is the period of migration. Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Danes are all moving and settling in Britain. Then there is the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’, which in modern American parlance refers to white people, thereby providing a hook to discuss race issues. Monks are a common image in early illuminated texts and by changing the colour of their habits to white and giving them white hoods, I have been able to change an illuminated coronation scene into the election of a new Klan chief (Old English Hexateuch (imperfect) c. 1050: f.59r.)

Death was ever present in the early medieval period. Plague, child birth and conflict made survival into old age far less likely than it is today. This medieval awareness of death is expertly imagined and dramatised by Ingmar Bergman in *The Seventh Seal* (1957). The ever-presence of death was compounded by the Christian churches’ belief in an eternal soul, where life is just a short sojourn before an eternal afterlife. Death and skeletons become a shorthand to remind the believer and to scare the non-believer of the temporary condition that is life. The aim is to remind the reader that one’s actions in life will have an impact on the destination after death. This core Christian message sees death and skeletons becoming an early medieval meme in illuminated texts and later medieval gravestones (Cybulskie 2014). In the chronicle the skeleton is also death. Death becomes the doctors to those who have lost their right to health care; the spokespeople of the National Spear Association (National Rifle Association) lobbying Donaeld to relax spear control and Death is an advisor to Donaeld advocating aggressive military responses.

A simple play on words is used to provide a link when discussing tax – tax becomes flax. Flax would have been commonly cultivated during the period and used in the production of cloth (Walton 1989). In the chronicle, Donaeld is regularly asked about filing his flax return. The analogy works as taxes in the period are well recorded with probably the most famous being the payment of Danegeld to Scandinavian armies to keep them from attacking and invading further (Kipling 1911).

The idea of resisting the current politics in the USA is a common theme on Twitter. Long threads cataloguing the signs of a shift toward authoritarianism are common, often going on to encourage the reader to get organised and to rebel (Chupeco 2018). On the Chronicle of Mercia, birds are the motif for the resistance. Birds are free to fly in the open sky and they are often seen pulling banners saying, 'resist' or 'rise'. They are the manifestation of these voices on Twitter, mimicking the blue 'Twitter' bird logo which is often seen as an illustrative shorthand for tweeting. The inspiration for this also comes from the Bayeux Tapestry where birds are a common motif – 506 counted, ranging from hawks to other birds enacting scenes from Aesop's fables through to more mythical creatures (Lauren 2012).

Women have played a leading role in the resistance. The day following the inauguration, the 21 February 2017, the size of the Women's March trumped that of the inauguration itself. The chronicles have tried to complement this resistance by incorporating the 'pussy hat' – a symbol of women's and human rights – into a number of panels (Pussy Hat Project 2018). Most women, outside the 'royal family' are portrayed wearing it. The Bayeux Tapestry is dominated by white men. This is something I have consciously tried not to replicate. This is a story of the present and women and racial diversity are part of that story. I make no apologies for making sure the chronicle reflects this.

'Yet, it is a story from the past'

Early medieval Britain works well as an analogy for reflecting the current political events as it is old yet familiar. It is a mix of small kingdoms, with Mercia at its geographical centre. North Korea becomes North Kent, China becomes Mystic East Anglia and the Mexicans become the Danes. The Vikings are well known - familiar from both school history lessons and the popular media. Just think of the Vikings as part of the Ladybird Great Civilisations series (Lewis and Jackson 2014) or the recent TV series, *Vikings*, now approaching its sixth series (Vikings 2013–present). Anyone who knows of Vikings knows that they raided monasteries and that these were full of monks writing illuminated texts. So, the monks become the press and their manuscripts become the media churning out 'Fake Chronicle' ('Fake News') via Twitter.

It is also the period of the epithet, so it is easy to imagine a president who rules by presidential decree while openly contradicting himself on Twitter and who famously does not read, as a Mercian king known with the epithet, 'the Unready': a nod to the famous Anglo-Saxon king Æthelred (Roach 2016).

'How will those of the future judge us?'

So, where does this leave Wulfgar and the Chronicle in terms of a theoretical under-pinning? Of everything I have read in preparing this manuscript, the one that resonated most was 'Disarticulate—Repurpose—Disrupt: Art/Archaeology,' (Bailey 2017: 691–670). In it Bailey states: '... the past [is] a source of material to be reconfigured in new ways to help people see in new ways' (Bailey 2017: 691). I could quote any number of passages from this paper that ring true and that capture much of my motivation. Key to Bailey's thesis is that,

The goal of archaeology is to open people's minds and disrupt perceived perceptions of society, politics, places, people and material culture. To this end art/archaeology is an invitation to use artefacts, traces, features and perceptions of the past as if they were fresh raw materials, palettes and tools in our creation of original work that has political intention and impact (Bailey 2017: 695).

The quote that really rings home, in terms of my own work, is: 'This project sees archaeology and art as a political tool for disrupting conventional political narratives of the past.' (Bailey 2017: 691). But, for me, it is the reverse. I see archaeology and art as a political tool for disrupting the political narrative of the present.

What I found interesting when reading Bailey's paper was how I recognised much of what he discussed. Yet, I have come to this organically by immersion in archaeology and art rather than by conscious thought and planning. Although I recognise much of what Bailey discusses in my own art, prior to researching this manuscript I had not distilled it nor fully rationalised what I was doing. To me it has always been natural to see the early middle ages as a rich palette and a source of inspiration (Figure 16).

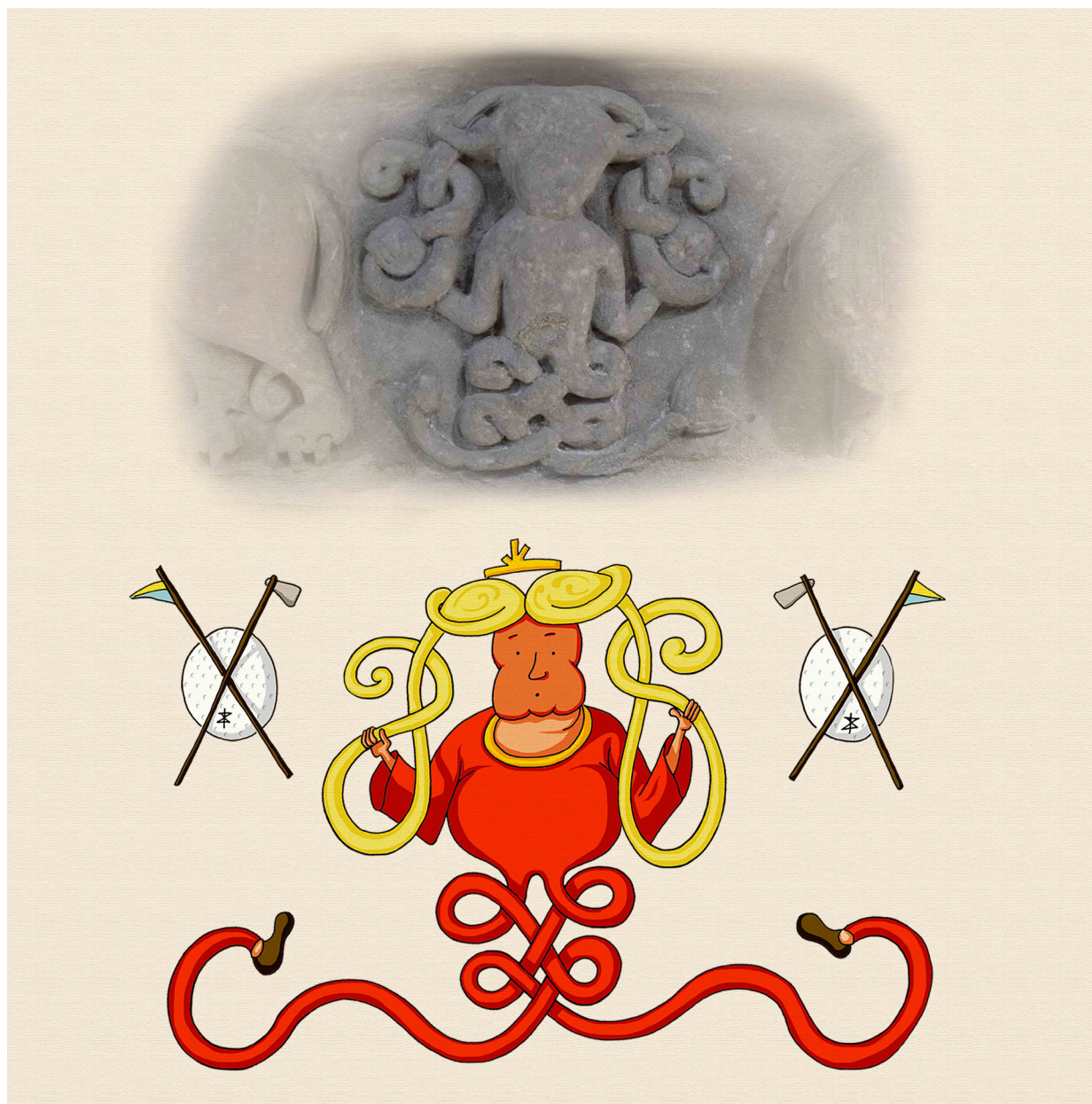


Figure 16: 'Dreaming of Mercia-a-Lago': The name of this panel plays on the name of the president's favourite Florida golfing retreat, Mar-a-Lago. Donaeld is portrayed, as if in a dream, with arms, hair and elongated legs intertwined - the hair in the shape of a dollar sign. The image is a direct reference to the Pictish 'Mermaid' stone, number 22, from the collection at Meigle, Scotland (HES 2018)

‘For they will see the land where the past and present blend to become one’

Even with such a vast hoard of period images, I have not limited myself to direct reference to the Early Middle Ages. I have used images from throughout history for inspiration while aiming to retain the look and feel of a tapestry (Figure 17). The challenge has been to combine the modern and period imagery and concepts while aiming to retain the essence and meaning of both. Examples include interlace knotwork, familiar from many illuminated texts, which has been used to mimic a graph in a financial newspaper showing the economic, environmental and societal differences between King Offa (Obama) and King Donaeld; Stonehenge, a place ancient to both the people of the middle ages and ourselves, used to address a cull in the number of heritage sites and national parks and, Donaeld lurching to the right, nearly capsizing his longboat, used as a reference to the president not condemning violence by alt-right marchers in Charlottesville, Virginia.



Figure 17 –Three panels which reference period detail and three panels which reference more modern artists. Top line: Top left, ‘It’s going to be all white’, references the Lewis chess pieces (BM 2017); top centre, ‘The Mother of All Axes’ references a grave marker from Lindisfarne (EH 2018) and top right: ‘This is an ‘A’ Donaeld’ references the Alfred Jewel and the Lindisfarne Gospel (MacGregor, 2012; BL 2018). Bottom line. Bottom Left: ‘Mercian Gothic’, references Grant Wood’s ‘American Gothic’ (Wood 1930); bottom centre: ‘100 days,’ references Pablo Picasso’s ‘Guernica’ (Picasso 1937) and bottom right, ‘Nothing to see here,’ which is based on a scene from Hieronymous Bosch’s, ‘The Vision of Tundale’ (Bosch c. 1485)

‘But now I must return to Mercia’

When I posted my first panel in Mercia I did not set out with the intention of creating a lasting chronicle. It is a common factor in art that one expression of creativity sows the seed for the next.

‘I did not intend to create a ‘true record’ ... The aim was to create an illustration of the moment, one that was pertinent to those people ... on the day. It was not an intention, initially at least, to create a document that would have any longevity.’ (Hale forthcoming)

What Alex Hale captures is how an artist's initial ambition doesn't necessarily match that which is ultimately achieved. Art has a tendency of morph. Where the initial panel was pitched into Mercia in an attempt to visualise Donaeld the Unready as he might be illustrated on the Bayeux Tapestry, the ambition to continue and to record drew from a deeper sense of wanting to hold the politicians to account and document their abuses of power.



Figure 18: The first panel of the Chronicle of Mercia (the Trumped-up Tapestry) hanging at the author's home on Christmas day 2018 (Image courtesy of Morgan Middleton).

‘And I will record it on cloth so that it is not forgotten’

I know from Twitter that my following is a likeminded audience and I am also aware that I am communicating within a social media echo-chamber. As with the Bayeux Tapestry, I want my panels to be seen. I want the message of resistance out there. So, I have produced a ‘tapestry’ or at least a roll of cloth telling a story (Spowart 2019). Whereas online the panels tend to be seen individually and have a lifespan of minutes, the cloth is a whole series of panels telling a story. It is light so that it can travel, and it aims to engage with my current audience and use them as a conduit to a larger audience. I am giving my audience something physical to engage with. Something they can touch, smell, unroll, hang, pack and pass on. It is an object that can be experienced solely as a piece of art, whose physical presence alone aims to be memorable, entertaining and attractive. Yet, at the same time, it captures the moment for posterity, so there is a lasting memory (Figure 18).

What is the value for those interested in the studying the early Middle Ages? You have seen it is not my aim to explicitly promote the period or to provide any deep insights. I hope to disrupt the present political narrative by using the past as a lens through which to view it. If there is a value, perhaps it is that through art it keeps the period relevant. It gives the period currency and provides a connection. It is not just a fossil. My work hopefully complements the corpus of creative works that reference, but don’t try to rewrite or possess, the early medieval period. To this end I have purposely referenced many of the artistic influences that orbit the academic centre and that have influenced me. From the blatantly historically inaccurate *Hägar the Horrible* (Browne 1974) who dresses like a cave man and sails around in his long-disproved horn helmet to Ingmar Bergman’s thoughtful and compelling film on the emotional impact of the Black Death (*The Seventh Seal* 1957), these all play their part in promoting an interest in and influencing the perception of the period. Some, such as Terry Deary’s *Horrible Histories* aim to entertain and educate and are unapologetic in using modern concepts, technology, music and ideas to help make their point more effectively - the ‘Sat-Rav’, from *Horrible Histories* television series, in reference to the Viking use of a hungry raven to help find land when lost at sea is one example that comes to mind (Deary and Brown 1996; *Horrible Histories* 2010). Others, like Umberto Eco, blur the lines by recasting the Victorian era detective Sherlock Holmes as *William de Baskerville* in the compellingly realistic feeling, yet entirely unrealistic, medieval scriptorium and library (Eco 1984).

There is a public appetite, keen to immerse itself in the early medieval period whether it be educational and academic like the British Library’s *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* exhibition (Breay and Story 2018); educational and sensory as with the reenactors at Jorvik offering, ‘exciting ... events, plus living history encampments, talks, tours and of course, dramatic combat performances.’ (The Jorvik Viking Festival 2019) or the just fun and fanciful as at the annual reimagining of a Viking fire festival/burial, as recreated at, ‘Up Helly Aa’, ‘a tradition that originated in the 1880s.’ (Up Helly Aa Committee 2009). There is a demand for events that feed the visceral as well as the intellectual. Jousting, medieval fairs and falconry offer a texture and a physicality not found in on the pages of a book and events such as Up Helly Aa allow us to experience, with all our senses, what it might have been to encounter the Fire Wyrms from *Beowulf* (Symons 2018). The past is a jigsaw of unknown size missing most of its pieces. Even the best period experts can only present a vision of the past based on a tiny fraction of material that has survived to us today. So, art, informed by known objects and events from the past, has a role to play in reimagining some of the missing pieces.

In terms of the use of social media I have found that it provides access to an international audience susceptible to the early medieval ‘meme’ that I would not have found so easily prior to the advent of the internet. Yet, to think of using social media purely as a mechanism to gain ‘clicks’, ‘followers’ and ‘influence’ is a mistake unless you are merely trying to sell something to the impulse buyer. Social media users are mostly fickle and will unfollow as fast as they follow if they are not provided with

regular content. The content that is provided has a very short initial lifespan – often just hours before it is forgotten and lost in the noise of the now. Followers will arrive mid-story lacking the context of the beginning and they will leave if the performance is interrupted by posting material out of character. The longevity of ‘Mercia’ seems partly to do with the continued political polarisation in America but also because of the organic evolution of the online Mercian ecosystem. Donaeld the Unready provides the focal point but there are now many, voluntary actors, contributing content. Mercia is inclusive, anyone can get involved. In the words of Emma Lazarus, ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free’ (Lazarus 1883). Yet while the immediate response may be over very rapidly the material remains archived online; a chronicle, a memory, a long-term record that we could see what was happening, that we did not all agree and that we resisted. In a small way holding the current political leaders to account (Figure 19).



Figure 19: A response on Twitter from 8 January 2019 to an image originally posted on 15 November 2018 and shown in full in Figure 8

Ultimately the past is not just about buildings, objects and dates; it is about human life. Archaeology cannot populate the past with all the creativity, fun, love and feelings that make us human so perhaps, using and abusing the hoard of images, left to us from the past, can help us think about the intangibles and starts to repopulate the past with people.

‘For it is the re-telling of a story told many times’

Art can have a long life. There are no guarantees, but early medieval art is a case study in how art survives where much else is lost. Who could ever have imagined the birch bark drawings of Onfirm surviving? The beauty and sheer artistry of books like the Lindisfarne Gospels or the Book of Kells must be one of the primary reasons they survive where most texts of the period have been lost. As well as having great religious value they were most likely, and are certainly now, valued as pieces of art. Art is venerated and cherished and looked after in a way little else is. So much so that, in the case of the Pictish stones in Scotland, the art is preserved beyond the meaning of the images themselves. The beauty and sheer craft skill are likely to have saved many of them from abandon and reuse in agricultural improvement walls.

Art would seem to be the ultimate medium if wanting to preserve a memory into the future. If something physical can be created that has presence and aesthetic beauty, it has a chance of surviving. It has a chance of being conserved to survive into the future to continue to counter the official narrative written into histories. But it is also a deeply personal endeavour. It is a protest, done to exorcise my feelings of political impotence and if others take something from this then that is a bonus.

The Chronicle of Mercia is art informed by archaeology. A single panel can tell a story while the Chronicle of Mercia aims to convey a history. The Chronicle of Mercia connects the past to the present and the present to a possible future.

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Afterword: Whose ‘Dark Ages’?

Bonnie Effros

This Afterword contextualises the collection by reviewing broader trends in the study of the history of medievalism. In particular, the analysis identifies current challenges for historical and archaeological research on the Early Middle Ages in the early 21st century, drawing on research on the tradition and legacy of racism and cultural and gender bias in the fields of early medieval archaeology and history and their reception from the 19th century to the present.

As the essays in this volume make abundantly clear, public archaeology related to the early Middle Ages or the ‘Dark Ages’ is not only alive and well, but it also exists in a wide variety of forms. One common theme woven through the contributions in this collection, however, is the multivalent nature of medieval material remains and how often their deployment relates as much to the present as to the past (Matthews 2015). While this fluidity offers many opportunities for meaningful public engagement, it also blurs the line that was once thought to exist between academic research and public-focused or ‘popular’ pursuits, the latter of which were traditionally viewed as being of lesser value in higher education (Shippey 2014). This feature of the study of the early Middle Ages is important precisely because the epoch has historically played such a decisive role in defining modernity, whether in terms of the origins of nations or civilization itself. Indeed, medieval studies have long been contested territory for competing ideologies (Ganim 2008). Moreover, the political ramifications of the deployment of the European Middle Ages operate globally; medieval studies are not a uniquely Western phenomenon (Maurya forthcoming).

In looking to the origins of these approaches, Pauline Stafford has observed that it was in the nineteenth century that scholars coined the term ‘medievalism’ and began to critique its underlying assumptions (Stafford 2007). In the 1970s, Leslie Workman, who many consider the founding father of medievalism as an academic specialism, set out a broader theoretical framework for its study. He approached medievalism in a foundational and holistic way, defining it as: ‘the study of the Middle Ages, the application of medieval models to contemporary needs, and the inspiration of the Middle Ages in all forms of art and thought.’ (Workman 1987). Workman also recognised the ways in which historical conditions affected the manifestation of medievalism. Neither the subject nor the approach was static but rather they changed in response to the circumstances and sensibilities of the era in which they occurred. In Britain, for instance, the novels of Sir Walter Scott and others encouraged medieval-inspired Romanticism and nostalgia for the Middle Ages in the nineteenth century (Girouard 1981; Lynch 2011; Simmons 2011). Among the Victorians, the ancient Saxons also occupied a special place (Williams 2008; 2013). These concepts played a measurable role in Britain until the catastrophic events of the First World War discredited the most romantic elements of medievalism’s glorification of warfare (Workman 1998). The recognition of such shortcomings was short lived and soon came to the fore again (Frantzen 2004). It is unfortunate (though not altogether surprising) to see the resurgence of medievalist ideology in propaganda used to promote Brexit in the United Kingdom (Rachman 2016; Grange 2018; Kissane 2018).

Whereas the Middle Ages were a period traditionally castigated as backward by progressive Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers in Europe, they gained traction in North America as early as the Revolutionary War. The medieval period represented a key element in the thinking of the Founding Fathers who wanted to lay claim to a white Anglo-Saxon past (Vernon 2018). This American brand of medievalism continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the

American South, for instance, proponents of the Middle Ages idealised medieval life and culture and placed great emphasis on the world of the nobility and its chivalric customs. Desirable attributes associated with the Middle Ages included dominant masculinity (including the revival of dueling as a means of defending one's honour), and was an excuse for moulding certain forms of feminine behaviour (Genovese 1989).

Despite distance in time and space, residents of New England likewise felt few qualms about staking claims to an unbroken chain of continuity between the forests of ancient Germany and the towns of colonial New England (Adams 1883). An alleged link between the Middle Ages and the United States could also be seen in the popularity there of the Arthurian tradition and the North American inclination to imitate Romanesque and Gothic architecture (Moreland 1996; Bloomfield 1989). Yet, nostalgia for the imagined medieval past, the golden age of the chivalric code, was tainted by strong anti-Catholic sentiment among those who advocated it in the United States (Jackson Lears 1994). For this reason, even in this period, criticism of the glorification of the medieval past pointed out the problems in promoting an era in which violence and cruelty were commonplace (Snay 1996).

However, many of the manifestations of medievalism in the American context were based on texts and architecture rather than archaeology, a logical outcome of the lack of proximity to medieval archaeological remains. The absence of many authentic examples of medieval remains remained the case well into the early twentieth century, when financiers such as J. Pierpont Morgan imported medieval antiquities to the United States; inspired at least in part by the Exposition universelle in Paris in 1900 and by his noble counterparts in Europe, his medieval collection was displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art both before and after his death in 1913. Morgan's contemporaries soon followed suit at other North American art institutions (Effros 2005). However, the relative rarity of a material foundation on which to base medieval fantasies about race and class up until this time made it a phenomenon mostly removed from archaeological artefacts with only a few exceptions. This was a situation quite different than that which was found in Britain, France or Germany (MacGregor 1998; Morowitz 2002; Crane 2000). Despite this distinction, medieval-inspired objects and architecture were common in both North America and Europe (Fleming 1995; Emery and Morowitz 2003).

In returning again to the subject of this volume, it is helpful to consider how scholars developed a growing awareness of disparate forms of medievalism and how they might be recognized. In 1991, Francis Gentry and Ulrich Müller built on Leslie Workman's approach and identified four different types of medieval reception. These included, first of all, the productive reception of the Middle Ages, which encompassed creative works that reformed medievalism into new products. Second, Gentry and Müller observed the reproductive reception of the Middle Ages, in which namely these works were reused in a manner thought to be 'authentic'. Third among their categories was the academic reception of the Middle Ages, the approach of trained 'professionals' who analysed and interpreted medieval subjects in a variety of disciplines. Finally, Gentry and Müller noted that medievalism's political and ideological reception might be documented when medieval events, themes, or individuals were used with political intent, whether for the purpose of legitimising or debunking a contemporary issue (Gentry and Müller 1991). This definition of medievalism, which included 'academic' approaches to the Middle Ages, further blurred the boundary between the 'professional' and popular.

Moreover, in the 1990s, as opposed to even just a few decades earlier, there was considerably less optimism among medieval specialists about the possibility of imagining a progressive Middle Ages, one that had promoted constitutionalism, rationality, and tolerance in the past (Cantor 1991). Yet, the long tradition of understanding the Middle Ages as foundational to current systems of law and justice meant that there was some hesitance to take up the challenge of postmodernism and the linguistic turn. However, Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel observed that there was much to be gained by

recognising the alterity of the medieval period. One important consequence was the wealth of studies that emerged from this decade forward on medieval gender studies, cultural history, and the critique of the excesses of the period (Freedman and Spiegel 1998). These developments, which moved away from a focus on elites and embraced more marginal aspects of the medieval period, helped close the gap between academic and popular forms of medievalism. These topics appealed to parts of the public that had largely been excluded from medieval studies, and suggested once again that academic historical and literary studies were not immune to the trends of their generation.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to understand that the focus of medieval studies even in the 1990s was trained mostly on the latter part of the Middle Ages, the period for which there was a much greater wealth of both documentary and architectural evidence. Historically, this epoch eclipsed early medieval research with the exception of the grand narratives explaining to the ‘fall’ of the Roman Empire and the rise of Late Antiquity (Wood 2013). While the conflict between Romans and barbarians had interested 18th-century historians like Edward Gibbon (Wood 2013), renewed attention grew out of the contributions of Henri Pirenne, especially his posthumous *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1937); as a consequence of his publications on economic history, trade and the fate of cities, archaeological study of the centuries following the end of the Roman Empire grew in importance. Subsequent to the Second World War, this research was supported by the expansion of archaeological exploration beyond the foci of cemeteries and architecture (Hodges and Whitehouse 1983; Effros forthcoming). In the view of Peter Brown, the contributions of Pirenne and the research they stimulated shifted attention away from the ‘fall’ of the Roman Empire and toward the wealth of cultural and religious change in the period of Late Antiquity (1974), even if they too were affected by Pirenne’s anti-German sentiment and colonialist view of North Africa (Delogu 1998; Effros 2017). Studies of early medieval historiography thus shed light on the ways in which interpretations of the history and literature of this period have been employed to support toxic nationalism and imperialism. Chief among the contributions documenting this tradition is the survey of Patrick Geary, followed by more detailed studies by Agnès Graceffa and Ian Wood (Geary 2002; Graceffa 2009; Wood 2013; Wood 2017).

What this historiographical legacy makes evident is that study of the ‘Dark Ages’ has never operated in a vacuum or been immune to the biases of its time. The literary scholars Howard Bloch and Stephen Nichols have suggested that practitioners would benefit from greater awareness of the extent to which their own agendas and desires determine the questions they pose and how they answer them. They note that since the early modern period, it had been assumed that scholars wielded ‘the disinterestedness of knowledge, the objectivity of philological science’ an idea that ignored the subjectivity of individual researchers which itself reflected their social position, religious affiliation, ethnic origin and other determining factors (Bloch and Nichols 1996).

Because the study of medievalism traditionally focused on texts and architecture, however, archaeology has long remained on the periphery in these discussions. This situation changed once research on the history of archaeology established a case for the longstanding links between nationalism and the development of archaeological research (Sklenár 1983; Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Schnapp 1996). One early medieval subject to which substantial attention was devoted involved thinking on early ethnicity. Critics noted that scholarly archaeological work on this subject remained too heavily dependent upon existing historical narratives established during the nineteenth century (Gillett 2002; Brather 2004). Although there was pushback against this revisionist critique of links between typological approaches and ethnic groups (Bierbrauer 2004; Härke 1998), increased distance from the catastrophic events of the Second World War meant that a reassessment of the anachronistic application of modern ideas of race to early medieval artefacts and human remains finally started to gained traction. It became clear that existing archaeological methodologies for the early Middle Ages shared many of the same predilections as their historical predecessors. They depended upon assumptions about the biological basis for ethnic differences and a binary system of gender expression

that reflected nineteenth-century mores rather than those of the early Middle Ages (Halsall 1995; Effros 2000; Brather 2004; Halsall 2007; Fehr 2010; Halsall 2010; Effros 2012).

Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, early medieval historians and archaeologists struggled over how best to address the legacy of the long association of medieval peoples with biological groups (Geary 1983; Halsall 1995; Gillett 2002; Effros 2003; Brather 2004; Pohl 2010). These disagreements with regard to what became known as the ‘ethnogenesis debate’ caused significant rancour among academics, many of whom identified with particular factions such as the ‘Vienna school’, the ‘Freiburg school’, and the ‘Toronto school’ (Curta 2007). Proponents disagreed over how to address these crucial issues due to their implications not only for the early medieval past but also the modern period (Goffart 2006). On the whole, however, there was widespread rejection of approaches that saw ancient peoples as tribes (Halsall 2007), even if there were some notable exceptions to growing scholarly consensus in this direction (Heather 2007, 2009). Yet, these debates were largely conducted in academic settings, and never conclusively settled the discussion among the wider public. Scholars in Eastern Europe, for instance, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, pointed to nationalists’ continued and emboldened use of older racialized approaches to medieval studies and sounded an ominous warning (Geary 2002; Bak *et al.* 2010). Within a decade, these ideas were likewise taken up by increasingly vocal white nationalists and Islamophobes in Western Europe and North America with horrific consequences (Wollenberg 2014; Elliot 2017).

The speed with which these ideas have been revived and made more mainstream owes in part to growing backlash against migration in Europe and North America. But it also owes to the success of digital media in spreading information (Wollenberg 2014; Elliot 2017). Whereas blogs and other forms of social media like Twitter are encouraged by universities interested in measurable impacts, and they have meant that medieval research gets to the public more quickly and more easily, the price has been the lack of a formal vetting process as is the case of peer-reviewed publications. The result is that these sources have few visible credentials beyond the number of followers, and many readers may not be able to distinguish more reliable commentary on medieval sources from that which is less well substantiated. Thus, while the transparency of online media has the potential to make the political inflections of scholarly work more visible to scrutiny, social media’s democratizing power has meant that anyone with access to a website can offer an opinion with or without qualification. As explained by Wulfgar the Bard (this volume), this situation has motivated some academics to become more deliberately involved in discussions since they feel an ethical obligation to push back when medieval narratives are harnessed in support of racial prejudice, white supremacy and extrajudicial violence (Elliot 2017; Whitaker 2019: 187–197).

As recounted above, there is absolutely no question that bias has long existed in the study and interpretation of the early Middle Ages, and this field has become increasingly divided in the age of digital fora. Public-facing archaeology of the early Middle Ages, like other fields, has been shaped by currents in modern historical, political, national, and global events. Yet, whilst the early medieval period might be located in the distant past, it has never been marginal. Medieval artefacts and sites continue to feed into arguments about history, identity, and politics, and thus shape outlooks in the present (Bonacchi 2016). And, with new forms of activism transpiring on social media, especially Twitter, the rules of engagement (and for that matter, the use of evidence) play out in unanticipated ways.

Although these circumstances may seem disconcerting in the way they have upset the traditional means of debating the early medieval past (Hines 2020; Williams 2019), social media platforms nonetheless offer a wealth of opportunities for understanding the project of medievalism. And, as clear from this volume, public archaeology of the early Middle Ages has a major contribution to make to these discussions since it is through such projects that many of the ‘public’ first experience physical remains of the early

Middle Ages. Although public archaeology has fierce competition from museums, video games, and television programmes, the contributors to this volume have shown that the field has the potential to offer positive opportunities for shaping engagement with, and reception of, the early Middle Ages. Yet, like other aspects of medieval studies, if poorly conceived, it has the potential to propagate racist constructions of the Middle Ages and support their appropriation anew by an increasingly visible contingent of white nationalists (Sturtevant 2017; Karkov 2019).

If there is anything to be learned from current disputes in the field of early medieval studies, it is that all of us, ‘academic’ and ‘public’ contributors alike, need to keep working to make the early Middle Ages, and early medieval studies for that matter, a more inclusive undertaking than the field has ever been. Indeed, there is no excuse for anyone to be marginalised or excluded from discussions of the early Middle Ages, whether on the basis of ethnicity, race, sex, gender or sexual identity, religion or disability, because others have claimed it to be exclusively ‘theirs’. Moreover, it is clear that the challenges raised with regard to medieval studies are not unique but rather symptomatic of much larger, endemic inequalities in academia and society as a whole (Royal Historical Society 2018a; 2018b). This volume, by including student perspectives, those of early career scholars and scholars with different backgrounds and expertise, has taken a step in the right direction by increasing the diversity of voices heard. Yet more work remains to be done. Public archaeology of the early Middle Ages, as the contributors to this volume have made clear, has the potential to be a space in which there is room for all to speak. But just as being an anti-racist is by necessity an ongoing project, a task that is never completed (Kendi 2019), the same is true of inclusiveness in medieval studies. The goal must be to transform this aspiration into a reality in both word and action.

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